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CHAPTER XLIX.

MR. ROSCOE'S CONGRATULATIONS.

IT is probable that Grace's guardian had come down to Hals-water in no very exacting mood towards his ward and favourite. The letter he had had from the Doctor had no doubt gone far to convince him that her complete recovery would be dependent upon the course of true love, which had been so cruelly interrupted, running for the future smoothly; and though it was both his duty and his desire to preserve her fortune for her, he felt that her health and happiness were still more important things; moreover, the fact, now patent to him, that Mr. Roscoe had by foul means broken the bond between the young couple, no doubt inclined him to mend it, and, above all, Grace had kissed him. Of course it was foolish of him to allow that last little matter to influence his conduct, but as a matter of fact it did, and he would have been worse than a fool had it been otherwise. The remembrance of how the girl he loved as though she had been his own daughter, weak and ill, and the mere shadow of her former self, had tottered out of her chair to thank him for his good tidings with a kiss, compelled him to obey her wishes as though they had been a decree of the Court of Chancery. After all, he had saved a little money for her in spite of her large charities, and she would have the ten thousand pounds which

Josh had left—though less in love than to make his testament secure—to any of his daughters that should go counter to the provisions of his will ; and Walter had a little money of his own, and a profession to follow.

Upon the whole, therefore, one may say that Mr. Allerton, instead of being an opponent of the young people, had accepted a retainer (from himself) on the other side. He did not grudge Philippa the good luck which would now make her for life, and possibly for ever, the inheritress of her father's colossal fortune ; it was better so, at all events, than if Agnes (because she had been less kind to Grace) had been in her place, though if he had known Philippa's secret his views might have altered altogether. To have found himself outwitted by Mr. Roscoe, and *that* man the master of Josh's million, would have been intolerable to the lawyer. In the present relations, however (so far as he understood them), between her and him, no such result seemed possible ; and he could so far afford to treat his enemy with great politeness. What puzzled him was why Mr. Roscoe had endeavoured to stop Grace's marriage. So long as he kept on good terms with the other two sisters, as had until lately seemed to be the case, there was every reason why he should have encouraged it. The person over whom he exercised so great an influence would have been far the richer by it ; and indeed there had been a time when he had certainly wished Grace to marry. However, it was obvious, whatever his reason, that he did not wish it now, and therefore Mr. Allerton could not resist the temptation of telling him with his own lips that the young couple were in a fair way of being reconciled.

'There has been some unfortunate misunderstanding, it seems,' he said, 'upon the part of Miss Grace ; but you will be happy to hear that it has now been cleared away.'

It was in the garden, where, just after he left Grace's room, he found Mr. Roscoe walking to and fro, that the lawyer made this innocent communication to him.

Mr. Roscoe gave him such a look as, if looks could wither, would have left him a skeleton, but answered indifferently enough, 'That is good news indeed.'

That he did not ask for any explanation of such unexpected tidings was proof positive to the lawyer that he did not dare to do so. This he did not need, however, as a corroboration of his view of Mr. Edward Roscoe's character, which had long been

formed ; of late days it had taken a dark tinge indeed, and if the other could have peeped into the lawyer's mind he would have been startled at the picture of himself he would have found there.

'Is Miss Grace sufficiently well to receive visitors ?' inquired Mr. Roscoe, presently.

'That depends ; she has just seen *me*,' observed Mr. Allerton.

'Oh, of course ; you are her guardian and her friend—which last, indeed,' he added hastily, 'we all are. But I suppose any thing liable to evoke excitement is still forbidden her.'

'The Doctor tells me Sinclair may be permitted to see her for a few minutes.'

'Oh !'—only a monosyllable, but it seemed to say a good deal ; 'things have gone so far on the way of reconciliation as that, have they ?'

'She will not, however, be able to see any one else to-day, I should say,' continued Mr. Allerton, significantly.

He would have forbidden him the sick-room altogether if he could have done so with reason.

'That seems judicious,' observed the other, coldly. 'Perhaps to-morrow she may be strong enough to receive my poor congratulations.'

In the meantime Walter had been permitted an interview with Grace, which was positively to last but a few minutes. Under such circumstances they were sure not to waste it in mere explanations which could be entered upon at any time if it was worth while ; moreover, Walter had been warned against them by the Doctor. The great point was that they were in each other's arms again.

'Heaven is very good to me,' murmured Grace in his ear. Walter smiled a little deprecatingly, as though he would have said, 'So it ought to be, for are you not one of its own angels ?'

'I never thought to see you again, Walter, my darling, my darling ! Oh, what have I not suffered !'

'No matter, sweetheart, it is all over now ; you have only to get well.'

'I am well,' she answered ; which was not quite true, but very pretty. The Beautiful and the True are not always the same thing, notwithstanding what the poets tell us.

'How could you, could you, bid me go away from you ?' he whispered, not reproachfully, but with the air of one who asks for information.

' You may well ask ; I must have been mad to believe them.'

' *Them* ? What was it they said against me ?' inquired Walter.

' Nothing. Do you think I should have believed them if they had ?' she answered indignantly.

' Of course not,' he said. It sounded like complacency, but he had suddenly remembered that this was a forbidden subject. ' As soon as you are strong enough you are to go south, to the seaside,' he added hastily.

' What ! away from you ?'

' How could that be possible, darling ? Where thou goest I will go.' He was about to continue the quotation with ' My people shall be thy people,' but felt it far from apposite and checked himself—not, however, as it appeared, in time.

' Do my sisters know that you are with me ?' she asked.

' Yes,' he said unhesitatingly ; the subject of Agnes was not of course to be discussed, but on the other hand reticence itself might provoke suspicion. ' Philippa was most kind in her congratulations ; I believe she is genuinely fond of you.'

' It is sad to have to make exceptions,' she answered with a sigh. ' I wish to be at peace with all the world. I suppose Agnes will come to see me presently.'

The Doctor had entered the room as she was speaking.

' Not to-day, Miss Grace,' he observed cheerfully ; ' you have had visitors enough. This one, indeed, flattered himself that you would not wish to see another after him—like leaving a pleasant taste in the mouth, which one is averse to lose by taking anything afterwards.'

' The Doctor is professional, even in his metaphors,' said Grace with a pleasant smile.

' I like to see my patients impudent,' returned the kindly old fellow. ' It may, however, be the result of intoxication ; I think you have had enough of this stimulant, my dear,' he added, looking towards Walter. ' His five minutes are up.'

The young man rose at once. Though he had said so little, he felt that there had been no loss of time. He was another man already, or rather two beings in one. His heart was filled with love and gratitude, and had no room for ignoble thoughts. He had even forgiven his enemies since all their plans had failed. In the library he found the brothers, apparently in far from amicable discourse. In reply to their inquiries after Grace, he gave them all particulars save those which concerned himself. He knew

that Richard's sympathy was genuine, and he could not believe just then that even Mr. Roscoe could be indifferent to his news. Nor did that gentleman seem indifferent; he was quite interested, indeed, in some parts of the narrative, and put several questions.

'Did she really look as if she had "turned the corner"? Was she in good spirits? Was the nurse always in her room? That Doctor, who dispensed his own medicines, gave her plenty of them, no doubt.'

Walter stood up for the Doctor, of whom Grace had spoken very warmly, and thought there had been nothing to complain of in that respect. 'She took no medicines now,' he said, 'except a strong tonic—strychnine.'

'A very dangerous thing,' observed Mr. Roscoe.

'It doesn't lie about,' said Walter, 'but is kept in the medicine chest in Miss Agnes's room, and administered only by the Doctor himself. He is a very careful fellow.'

Mr. Roscoe was glad to hear it, glad to hear such a good report of the dear invalid, glad to find (from Mr. Allerton) that the cloud that had shadowed the young people's prospects of late had given way to sunshine.

It would have seemed, in short, strange to Walter that Mr. Roscoe, in his effusiveness, had not shaken hands with him, but that he reflected that his offering to do so would have seemed too much like 'making up,' and it was evidently the other's endeavour to show that there was no need for that, nor ever had been. The young fellow was willing enough to find things on this footing. He was in Eden, and did not wish to be reminded of the existence of the serpent: he, too, wished to be at peace with everybody.

Curiously enough, Richard had manifested less concern in what he had to say than Edward, on whom he kept his eyes throughout with no very fraternal expression.

'I am afraid, Richard, you have been having some unpleasantness with your brother?' said Walter, when they found themselves alone together.

'Well, yes,' replied Richard reluctantly, 'we have each been telling the other what we thought of him.'

'That is bad,' answered Walter, though, in truth, nothing seemed bad, or at least unendurable, to him at that moment. 'It is like two women telling one another that they are ugly.'

'Well, we didn't say that,' replied Richard gravely ; 'but let me tell you one thing : my brother is never so ugly as when he smiles, and he has been smiling on you. It is a bad sign.'

'Come, come, that is a jaundiced view indeed,' remonstrated Walter. 'Of course he is not pleased at the failure of his plans, though he pretends to be ; but, like a gambler who has lost, he has made up his mind to pay up and look pleasant. Do not let us be hard upon him, when everything has turned out well. Oh, Richard, I am so happy.'

'You deserve to be,' sighed Richard. 'You are a good fellow. But do not let generosity to a fallen enemy carry you too far—to trust him, for instance. The Indian is never so dangerous as when he has received a mortal wound. I have seen a man kneel down by the side of one to give him a cup of water, and get a knife driven into his heart for his pains.'

CHAPTER I.

HIS LAST THROW.

GOOD news is the best of tonics, and the day after her interview with Walter, Grace felt that she had made great progress on the road to convalescence. The Doctor, who had hitherto come twice a day, was not to visit her in the afternoon ; but in the morning, finding her both able and willing to receive visitors, he gave her permission to do so after the midday meal. He would have preferred such excitement to be postponed still a little longer, but his patient was nervously desirous to get both visits over—especially that of Mr. Roscoe, who had made tender application to see her. It was the less easy to refuse it since Agnes could not come, for a reason that they did not as yet dare tell her, but ascribed her absence to indisposition. If Grace felt equal to receiving two visitors, she could certainly see one. In reality, she was neither so strong, nor so brave, as she represented herself to be. The last time she had seen Mr. Roscoe he had almost driven her into her grave with his falsehoods and insinuations ; and though she had no fear of their being repeated, and was willing enough to let bygones be bygones, she could not forget them ; but having once said, 'I will see him,' she had not the courage to own herself a coward.

Philippa's tone, when she brought his message to her, had not been reassuring; she repeated it like a parrot, yet with an air of distress which to Grace was unaccountable.

'You must not be astonished,' she said, 'if you see some change in Mr. Roscoe. He has had his troubles like the rest of us.'

In the case of any other person Grace would have inquired, 'What troubles?' Her silence and want of sympathy spoke volumes, but awoke no surprise in her sister. Her wonder was that no one but herself seemed to have any suspicion of Edward Roscoe in connection with the disappearance of her sister. To her mind his very face—for she had spoken less than the truth when she said, 'You will see some change in him'—was a self-accusation of crime. His hollow eyes illumined by strange fires (like natural caverns shown to visitors), his sunken cheeks, his listening and distracted air, were to her fancy so many witnesses against him; yet, ghost of his former self as he was, she did not pity him, and felt as if she never should. In this last conviction she was, however, mistaken. She had gone to him at his desire that morning to acquaint him with the result of his application to see Grace.

'She will see you at half-past two,' she said. 'You must not talk to her on any exciting subject. The interview must not last beyond five minutes. The nurse will be in the next room, and will come in at the expiration of that time.'

All this was said mechanically, as if learned by rote and spoken to a stranger; but she was satisfied with the performance of her task. She had at least shown no sign of the horror and loathing with which she regarded him. And he, too, had seemed satisfied, for indeed he now expected little from her. It was something that she could command herself, which, when they were alone together, was by no means always the case. She would give way to remorse, despair, and hysterical sobs, to stop which neither menace nor arguments—blandishments he dared not use, she shrank from them as though he were a leper—were of any avail.

'I will come to you,' he said, 'at the appointed time, if you will be my usher.'

But she saw him before that.

She had been despatched by the doctor to administer Grace's tonic to her that forenoon, and was on her way to Agnes's room

to fetch it, when she met her husband face to face at the very door. He was coming out as she was going into the room, and they both started back in amazement and alarm. It was not a place in which either of them was likely to find the other, for it was hateful to both of them; but Philippa, as has been said, had business there.

'I came for a book,' he said, in dry, hoarse tones, in answer to her wondering glance, 'but could not find it.' It was strange that he could not also find a less transparent excuse for what he had not been accused of, but Edward Roscoe was not himself. Nor, even of late days, had he ever looked so unlike himself. His face was livid, his eyes were wild and bloodshot.

'What is the matter?' inquired Philippa, terrified for the moment by his appearance out of the utter indifference to his well-being or otherwise that had taken possession of her.

'Nothing. You had better ask no questions. All you have henceforth to do is to hold your tongue. Forget everything else and remember *that*.'

The words were spoken like the flick of a whip, and there had been a time when they would have silenced her; but her fear of him, strangely enough, was half overcome by her fear *for* him. She was convinced that he was about to do something desperate, and, as she thought, to himself. This man was after all her husband.

'Edward, what are you thinking of? Do not look at me like that. It is possible to make matters even worse than they are.'

'They must be worse before they are better,' he answered coldly. 'Leave *me* alone, and I will leave *you* alone.' She was moving after him as fast as her trembling limbs would permit her; he turned round and faced her with a mocking smile. 'You had better not; I am going somewhere where you would not like to follow me.' He passed through the door that shut off the corridor from the narrow staircase and locked it behind him.

A few minutes afterwards Philippa, with head uncovered, was running through the thick falling snow to the 'Cottage,' crying, 'Richard! Richard!'

Richard Roscoe met her in the lobby.

'Your brother has left the house,' she cried in pitiful tones. 'For heaven's sake, follow him; I fear he will do himself a mischief.'

'I think not,' he answered drily. 'Let me know exactly what has happened.'

She told him what had actually taken place, for, indeed, she had no wits left to conceal, far less to invent, anything. 'I met him coming out of Agnes's sitting-room, looking like a madman; he said he was going somewhere where I dared not follow him—and he is gone.'

'Was that all?' inquired the other cynically, when Philippa stopped for want of breath.

'Alas! no, it was not all. When I opened the medicine chest in Agnes's room to get her tonic, as the doctor had told me to do—it is strychnine, you know—the bottle was gone.'

'The strychnine!' cried Richard, with sudden excitement; 'what did he want that for?'

'Ah! what indeed? It could only be for one purpose.'

'Which way did he go?' inquired Richard, hurriedly. 'Is he upstairs or down?'

'He is gone out, I tell you. I saw him, through the window, going towards the lake.'

Richard reached down his wideawake from the peg in the lobby.

'You must not go out like that in this snow,' cried Philippa, with nervous carefulness; 'you will catch your death of cold. Let me help you with your great-coat.'

'Are you *sure* he went out of doors?' asked Richard, as he drew it on.

'I am quite sure.'

'Well, well, I'll follow,' said the other. But he was no longer in such hot haste. His apprehensions, which had seemed so keen, had unaccountably subsided. 'Perhaps he is in the summer-house on the terrace.'

'Oh, no, I should think not,' she answered faintly.

'Why not? It is the only place under cover. Well, I'll find him. In return, however, promise me *this*—that until I come back again the nurse shall never leave your sister's room.'

'She never does leave it.'

'She left it yesterday,' he answered bluntly, 'when Sinclair was with her.'

'Walter is different, you know,' said Philippa, with a feeble smile. 'Nobody else would be admitted unless the nurse were present. Those were the Doctor's orders.'

'Never mind his orders; I want your promise that it shall be so.' His tone was fierce; his manner for the first time reminded her of his brother crossed.

'Indeed, I will see to that, Mr. Richard,' she answered humbly and amazed, 'upon my honour.'

He nodded, and, pressing his cap over his brows, went out into the whirling snow.

Philippa returned at once to Grace's room. She had resolved to stay there herself till she should have news from Richard. His words had added a vague alarm to her fears on Edward's account, notwithstanding that the two were somehow incompatible. Though in perfect health, and with wealth, as her husband had assured her for her comfort (though it had given her none), beyond the dreams of avarice, there was no more miserable woman in all the world. How infinitely to be envied was her sister, though enervated by sickness, and with no brilliant prospect before her! She was about to marry the man of her choice; ignorant of evil schemes and plans, far less of crime; full of hope and trust; grateful even for ministrations from a hand that had helped to harm her.

'What is the matter, Philippa?' for with returning health her eye had resumed its keenness for the signs of unhappiness in others.

'Nothing, dear; that is, I am a little anxious because Mr. Roscoe and his brother are out in this dreadful snow.'

'That is surely very imprudent of Mr. Richard,' observed Grace. Her sympathies, it seemed, did not extend to his brother. Then presently, 'I hope Agnes is really better; I have not seen her for so many days. Sometimes I fear that she does not want to see me.'

'She would come if she could, dear Grace—of that you may be certain,' said Philippa, earnestly.

'Have you seen her this morning?'

'I had only just left her room when I came into yours.' To have to give such replies to such questions had been long the duty of those who attended Grace's sick-room. They had got used to the practice of duplicity; though it was always dreadful to Philippa to have to speak of Agnes, there was just now another weight upon her mind even more oppressive. Her words were mechanical, and gave her little pain.

'There is the luncheon gong, dear Philippa; I must insist on your going downstairs to the others; you are moping yourself to

death up here. Nurse will take good care of me—though indeed I now hardly want anyone.'

Philippa was very willing to go, for anxiety to know whether the brothers had returned consumed her; but before doing so she laid strict injunctions on the nurse not to leave the invalid till she returned.

'I am not in the habit of leaving my patients, madam,' was the tart reply. Sick nurses are angels nowadays, but their wings are of a delicate texture, and they must not be 'sat upon.'

'My sister had a reason, nurse,' interposed Grace sweetly, 'and I am grateful to her, though you are quite right too. You would not leave me alone with any visitor, I know.'

Then the other two understood that the idea of the interview with Mr. Roscoe was weighing on her mind.

CHAPTER LI.

PHILIPPA SPEAKS OUT.

THE luncheon-table at Halswater Hall had of late been but sparingly patronised, but the guests were now few indeed; Mr. Allerton and Walter were the only ones that Philippa found there. Places, indeed, were laid for the two brothers, but they had not yet come in, though none but herself entertained any serious apprehensions on their account.

'Why people in the country go out in weather that they would not dream of exposing themselves to in town,' remarked the lawyer, helping himself to pigeon pie, 'is always a riddle to me without an answer. It can't be for appetite, for though I have been writing all the morning I am quite as hungry as if I had been wet through or frozen. Why do they do it?'

'There is no harm in it if one is strong and well,' observed Walter; 'but for Mr. Richard to have gone out on such a day as this is certainly very imprudent. Don't you think so, Miss Philippa?'

'No doubt it is; and I am sorry to say it is I who was the cause of it,' was the unexpected reply.

Remorse, or perhaps the 'late beginnings' of a resolve to be frank and open in the future in all things permissible, had moved her to the confession, yet no sooner was it made than she repented of it. She perceived too late that her words required

an explanation ; her companions, indeed, were obviously waiting for it.

'I had seen Mr. Roscoe in the garden, and I begged his brother to fetch him in,' she added, after a pause.

'In the garden, in a snowstorm !' ejaculated the lawyer. 'You should have sent him out a strait-waistcoat with "Miss Philippa's compliments, and the padded room was being prepared for him." What on earth can they be doing, do you suppose ? Gardening ?'

There was a look on Philippa's face that checked Walter's answering smile.

'If they do not return in five minutes,' he said gravely, 'I will go out and seek for them.'

'Madman No. 3,' observed the lawyer.

There really seemed no possibility of their having come to harm, though it must be admitted that if there had been the speaker would have borne it with equanimity. He detested Edward, and knew nothing of Richard except that he was Edward's brother.

'There is the front door bell !' cried Philippa, starting to her feet. 'They have come back.' And with that she hurried from the room.

'Everybody is mad to-day !' exclaimed the lawyer. 'If Roscoe has come back, why should Miss Philippa suppose he would ring the bell ? It is not his way in his own house.'

'I am really afraid there is something wrong,' said Walter ; 'I know what a snowstorm is in this region.'

'And yet you are going out in it ?'

'I have promised,' was the other's quiet reply, as he rose from the table.

'Very good,' answered the lawyer, grudgingly ; 'only remember there is some one interested in your welfare, which, as far as I know, is not the case with the other two gentlemen.'

The visitor turned out to be the Doctor, who had come long before his time because of the snowstorm.

'It was a case of now or never,' he said to Philippa, who received, though it could hardly be said welcomed, him. Her anxiety about the brothers was getting overwhelming. What could have happened ?

'Every hour makes travelling more difficult. It is weather in which one would not turn out a curlew ; nobody could stand it

but a country doctor. Well,' as Philippa led the way upstairs, 'how is your sister?'

'Progressing, I think, though she seemed a little depressed this morning.'

'Depressed! That should not have been. She had her tonic, I suppose, as I directed?'

'No, she did not.'

In spite of her new-born resolutions Philippa would have evaded the question had it been possible; but to have been caught out in a falsehood about the matter—which was almost certain to happen—would have been dangerous indeed.

'She did not? And why not?'

The Doctor had stopped short in his march along the corridor, and put the question with some energy. He was a great stickler for medical authority, and especially his own authority.

'I could not find the bottle,' she murmured.

'Not find the bottle? This must be inquired into at once, Miss Philippa. It contained, as I told you, strychnine, a deadly poison, and should be always kept under lock and key.'

They were standing opposite the door of Agnes's room, and the Doctor entered it at once. The medicine-chest, a highly ornamented affair, stood on a bracket, with the key in it.

'You surely never left it like that?'

'I am not sure,' she murmured faintly. 'The key ought to have been in my own drawer; but not finding it there when the hour came for giving Grace her tonic, I thought it might be where you now see it. It was there, but the bottle was gone.'

'Yes, madam,' said the Doctor, looking at her with great severity; 'and I perceive that you know who has taken it. It is I who will be held responsible in this matter, and I must insist upon knowing it too.'

'Mr. Roscoe took it.'

'Mr. Roscoe!' The Doctor's face turned suddenly pale; perhaps he had had already his suspicions of Mr. Roscoe, or they had been aroused by Mr. Allerton's views of that gentleman.

'This is a very serious affair, Miss Philippa. I do not leave the house until that bottle is placed in my possession. Where is Mr. Roscoe?'

'Would to heaven I knew!' she answered earnestly. 'He has gone out, taking the bottle with him. He has been away for hours in this pitiless snow.'

'Better out than in,' was the Doctor's reflection. The knowledge that the man was absent soothed certain immediate apprehensions that had seized his mind; the sight of Philippa's terror-stricken face filled him with pity for her.

'You think he meant mischief—I mean, of course, to himself—do you? But why should he have gone out of doors?'

'I do not think he knew what he was doing, Doctor. If anything has happened to him, which Heaven forbid, he was not responsible for his actions. He has had much to trouble him of late.'

'Did he go out before lunch?'

'Oh, yes! Long before.'

The question was not asked for the reason that Philippa supposed. The fact has been well ascertained that people do not commit suicide upon empty stomachs.

'Well, well, we must wait and see; your sister, of course, must know nothing of this. Her tonic, if she asks about it, has been intermittent.'

Grace did not ask about it. She was not one of those invalids who are solicitous about their medicine.

'Am I very bad to-day?' she inquired, smiling, noticing the Doctor's serious looks.

'No, miss, you are better, but you must have change of air. The sooner you can get away from this place the better.'

'And poor Agnes, too. She must need change as much as I, by all accounts.'

The Doctor nodded assent. 'When she hears the truth,' he was saying to himself, 'it is probable she will have a relapse.'

True to his promise, he remained at the Hall, and not unwillingly, perhaps, considering the state of the weather, accepted the offer of a bed for the night.

After some hours Walter returned, looking like a snow-man. He had seen nothing of the brothers; they were not in the grounds, nor had any one the least idea where they could be. Some one had seen them walking together, he said, towards the head of the lake, and thither Walter had gone, but there was no trace of them in that direction. If they had been seen at all, they must have been going the opposite way, towards the post-town. The dinner-party that day included the Doctor, the lawyer, and Walter only, Philippa having declined to appear. The meal was a very silent one till the servants had withdrawn,

when the conversation, though gloomy, did not flag. The three men, being of one mind in the main, talked openly with one another.

'The absence of these gentlemen is getting very serious,' said the Doctor. 'Is there any possible explanation of it?' The story of the strychnine, which after all could only affect one of them, he kept to himself.

'I have none,' said Walter. 'I can only say that if they have have not been housed somewhere long ere this I fear it will go hard with them.'

'I will say more than that: in that case they are dead men,' said the Doctor. 'You do not take so serious a view of it, Mr. Allerton?' For, indeed, there was a half-smile on the lawyer's face. 'You do not know what Cumberland is in a snow-storm!'

'I don't know the scene of this drama so well as you do, Doctor,' answered the other drily; 'but, perhaps, I know one of the characters better. He may have his own reasons for disappearing; but he will have taken care (of that I am certain) of his precious skin.'

'But why should he want to disappear in such an unaccountable fashion?'

'It is one way of settling with one's creditors—and, unless rumour does him wrong, he has a good many. Between ourselves, he has been very hard hit indeed; and as to the fashion, nothing could be better chosen. It makes a clean sweep of the slate. It would never have done, if he meant going, to go away in a carriage and pair. His position here is not what it was; perhaps he felt that the game was up. And if he has gone, I shall be very much surprised if he has gone empty-handed. What you are saying to yourself, I know, Doctor, is, "This is a lawyer's view of his fellow-creatures"; but I know the man I am talking about.'

'But, my dear Mr. Allerton,' said Walter, 'we have to account for the absence of two men, and not of one.'

'They are two men who are brothers, however; to leave Richard behind him would have been to leave a witness against him who could never stand cross-examination. It is my opinion that they have laid their plans beforehand, and that it is a family affair.'

'There, I would stake my life upon it, Mr. Allerton, you are wrong!' exclaimed Walter, earnestly. 'Edward Roscoe may be

all you think him to be, but Richard is an honest fellow. He would never be mixed up in anything disgraceful. Moreover, he has not the least sympathy with his brother, and hates his wicked ways.'

'Well, well, we shall see,' said the lawyer, cracking his walnuts. 'There is no one like your scoundrel for putting a fancy value upon his existence, and I have the greatest confidence in Mr. Roscoe's taking care of himself.'

'I agree with you so far,' said the Doctor; and indeed he was quite of opinion that Mr. Roscoe had not taken Miss Grace's tonic for his own use; 'but I have grave fears for the safety of both these gentlemen, nevertheless.'

As time went on and nothing was heard of the missing men that apprehension became general. The household was plunged in the same state of grim uncertainty that it had been on the occasion of the disappearance of Miss Agnes, but it lasted much longer. There was no key to it, as there had been in the former case.

It was noticed with surprise that Miss Philippa was even more affected by it than she had been at the loss of her sister, but this was in reality because she was seen to be affected. On the other occasion she had withdrawn herself from the rest, whereas she was now always about the house, looking through every window on the snow that still covered the cold earth, and always on the watch for she knew not what. She suffered from insomnia, and began to give the Doctor more anxiety than his other patient, who, indeed, was making rapid progress towards recovery. She had a better tonic than Mr. Roscoe was supposed to have deprived her of, in the visits of her lover, and she took them twice a day. Mr. Allerton never wavered in his opinion that the brothers had gone away for reasons of their own; and when their return seemed out of the question he ventured to express his views to Philippa herself.

'It grieves me,' he said, 'to see you so distressed about your missing friends. Dr. Gardner tells me you are fretting about them day and night. I am convinced in my own mind that an explanation is to be found for it.'

'What explanation?' she inquired eagerly.

'Well, it is not a pleasant thing to say of an absent man but I happen to know that Mr. Roscoe has for a long time been in difficulties; he is unable to meet his engagements, which are very

heavy, and has therefore probably run away from them. That is the plain truth.'

He looked for an outburst of indignation, but she shook her head, and answered gently : 'No, it is not that ; I know all about his difficulties.'

Mr. Allerton stared. 'The deuce you do !' was what he was saying to himself.

'You are a wise man. Think, think, of some other solution,' she went on in despairing tones. 'Have you no hint, no clue ? This suspense is more than I can bear.'

The lawyer looked sharply up at her ; he had never had so high an opinion of Mr. Roscoe's talents as at that moment, nor thought so badly of him.

'We have no clue because we have no data,' he answered. 'If his brother had been left behind we could have examined Mr. Roscoe's papers ; but, as it is, we have no authority to meddle with them.'

'Then I give you that authority, for I am his wife !'

'Good heavens, madam ! and how long has that been ?'

'We were married before my father's death.'

CHAPTER LII.

THE BURNT MILLION.

If the revelation made by Philippa gave the lawyer no immediate clue to the mystery in hand, it made clear another matter which had always puzzled him. Hitherto he could never understand why Mr. Roscoe had not incited the sisters to dispute their father's will. The reason was now plain. Whatever view a judge might have taken against restraint of marriage and in favour of religious liberty, he would certainly have stretched no point for a man who, living under the same roof with her, had clandestinely married his employer's daughter. That Mr. Roscoe had enjoyed—or, at all events, spent—an income to which neither he nor his wife had had any right would, under other circumstances, have been a serious consideration, but just now there were things more pressing. Poor Josh's million would, after Grace's marriage, now belong to the representatives of his far-away cousins, or, failing them, to the national exchequer. It is not

possible to describe how the honest old lawyer resented this fact. He almost regretted that he had given his consent to the union of those two young people, for whom he nevertheless felt more affection than for any other of his fellow-creatures. It was really throwing money away—and such a heap of money!

Nevertheless, he not only set to work upon this distasteful matter, but took Walter into his confidence. He was a little disappointed at the lack of interest which the young fellow showed in Philippa's revelation. 'You seem hardly to understand, my young friend, that but for this mad marriage of hers—about which I fear there is little doubt; it was done at the register-office in Kensington, within half a mile of Cedar Lodge—she would have been the richest woman in England; nay, sir—for I must needs be frank with you—I have pointed out to Grace that if she chooses to give you up she may be herself that richest woman.'

'So she told me,' observed Walter drily.

'Oh, she did, did she? Then I call it a distinct breach of confidence as between ward and guardian.'

'But she also said that you were afraid matters had gone too far between us to admit of her giving me up,' continued Walter, smiling.

'I said I thought you would have ground for an action for breach of promise,' growled the lawyer, 'and that perhaps she would not like to appear in the witness-box; but I wish you to know what she is giving up for you.'

'Indeed, Mr. Allerton,' said Walter gravely, 'I put that matter before her as forcibly as my heart would let me; though, in giving me herself, she had already given what is worth more than all the wealth in the world. The fact is that she detests the very name of money. Through it, as I gather, she believes her father became the man he was—and indeed, from all I hear, he worshipped it; through it this unhappy man Roscoe has been tempted to do all sorts of dirty tricks; through it, and the jealousies and disappointments arising from it, her home, which might otherwise have been such a happy one, has been made a hell; through it, and the plots and plans to secure it, she was almost separated from the man she loves for ever. It is no wonder that Grace hates money.'

The lawyer listened in silence; it was not his way to hear money run down (as it often is by those who are very willing to

experience its temptations) without pointing out that it may be a blessing instead of a curse, but he had nothing to say for poor Josh's million. In his heart of hearts he suspected that much worse had come of it than even Grace gave it credit for; and besides, it was now passing out of the hands of his clients into those of a stranger.

'I give you my word, Mr. Allerton,' continued Walter, 'that I had a hard matter to persuade her that even the 10,000*l.* her father left her ought not to be given up, because it might originally have been wrung from the widow and the orphan.'

'What infernal nonsense!' ejaculated the lawyer; 'if Josh had not got it, it would have been lost at cards or on the race-course. Upon my life, even the best of women—but pray go on.'

'I was only going to say that what seems to me the worst thing about Roscoe was his setting poor Grace against her father's memory; to tell her the truth was bad enough, but it seems he invented some hateful lie about his having defrauded my father, which, if, as I understand, you had not set right, would have kept us apart for ever.'

'Yes; that falsehood of Roscoe's puzzles me still; he had generally *something* to go upon, but that must have been pure invention. Well, I want you to be with me while I examine his papers, which may be very queer reading. He was a methodical fellow—a good man of business in his way—and if he has not burnt them, we may find some clue to his disappearance. It's a nasty thing to do, but we shall have to break open his desk.'

'That is rather a strong measure, is it not?'

'No doubt it is; but desperate diseases require desperate remedies. I have his wife's authority to do it.'

Mr. Roscoe's sitting-room was the very abode of neatness. Everything that a man of business could want was there, and in its place. Here the weekly bills of the household were audited and settled, and the tenants came to pay their rents. Huge MS. books with clasps and keys, with letters painted on them, were on the shelves; their proprietor was a man who could have given an account of his stewardship—though it was never demanded of him—down to the last penny. The desk, which Mr. Allerton recognised as having originally belonged to the late Mr. Tremenhere, was an immense structure, as big as a wardrobe. It had held secrets in Josh's time, which the lawyer would have

given much to have got hold of; and it doubtless held secrets now. The middle part of it—the desk proper—was that to which he first gave his attention. It was locked, of course, and with no ordinary key; and it took some minutes with hammer and chisel to force it open. It was full of papers, all docketed and arranged with admirable neatness.

'I was wrong,' exclaimed Mr. Allerton, as he cast his eyes over them. 'The man is dead. He would never knowingly have left these proofs behind him.' There were statements of accounts with the two Miss Tremenheres—some of them were memoranda, but all expressed in the most concise and careful manner—which almost made his hair stand on end: huge sums of money, varying from 500*l.* to 5,000*l.*, which had been received from them at different times, and all, no doubt, lost in speculation. On one of them borrowed from Agnes not many weeks before was written in pencil the words, 'Very difficult'; there was no such note to Philippa's loans, which were much more numerous and larger. 'What an insatiable scoundrel!' muttered the lawyer; 'and I have no doubt that he spent every shilling on himself.'

'There is a letter to Richard with an American post-mark,' observed Walter, who was looking over the other's shoulder; 'I wonder how *that* came into Mr. Roscoe's desk.'

'I am afraid we have no business with it,' said the lawyer doubtfully.

'I am quite sure Mr. Roscoe had none,' replied Walter. 'Richard has had no letter, as he told me himself, poor fellow, bitterly enough, since he came to England; and his brother keeps the bag.'

'Judas!' muttered Mr. Allerton, and tore open the document. 'Great heavens! this is news indeed!'

'What have you found?'

For a moment the lawyer was unable to answer him. His ordinary impassive face was full of excitement; his hands trembled as he read.

'This concerns you, my lad; do you know the handwriting?'

'Indeed I do,' cried Walter, greatly moved; 'it is my poor father's.'

It was the document addressed to Walter which Richard had left for safety in America, and had been forwarded to him by his correspondent; it was duly witnessed, and set forth in a simple style that for certain reasons the writer had changed his name

of Vernon for Sinclair, and how he had been cheated of his property by his cousin, Joseph Tremenhere. ‘I have no wish that you should resume your name, dear boy,’ it went on to say, ‘and far less nourish animosity against him who wronged me, but I have thought it right that you should know who you really are in case I may not live to tell you, and to acquaint you with my unfortunate history. The man to whom I have entrusted this paper is my dearest friend, and may be thoroughly relied on.’

The frown that had at first settled on Walter’s face was now succeeded by a look of the profoundest dejection.

‘Then Roscoe spoke the truth to Grace after all,’ he sighed.

‘Only just as much of it as suited his purpose. I know something you do not know. Walter, I have great news for you. Mr. Tremenhere, no doubt repentant of the wrong he had done your father, made him, under certain conditions, the heir of his whole fortune. These conditions, by the death of one daughter and the marriage of another, have been fulfilled, except as far as Grace is concerned, and now in marrying you she will lose nothing, for the money which she thereby forfeits will revert to yourself. It was the knowledge of this fact thus conveyed that no doubt caused Roscoe, who was previously in favour of your marriage, to oppose himself to it; why he kept such a dangerous secret in his possession it is impossible to tell, but we may be sure he never intended to disclose it, save for reason good. However, it has now fallen into the proper hands. My dear Walter, I congratulate you sincerely; you are as rich as Crœsus.’

‘You mean to say that, thanks to this document, I can become so?’

‘Certainly; it will only be necessary to prove its correctness.’

‘And without it?’

‘Well, of course nothing could be proved——Madman! what have you done?’

Walter had suddenly thrown the paper into the fire and set his heel upon it.

‘You have burnt a million of money!’

‘I have burnt the only evidence of Mr. Tremenhere’s fraud,’ answered Walter coolly. ‘Do you suppose that the ignorance of that miserable fact will not be a greater comfort to her than the reflection that she had all the money in the world? Has her experience of what money can do been likely to induce her to value it?’

The lawyer stared at him with astonishment and horror ; he hardly knew what he said ; his moral nature—or that second one with which his profession had supplied him—had suffered a serious shock.

‘It was too great a sacrifice,’ he muttered, as if in protest, ‘to be made for any man.’

‘At all events,’ returned Walter, smiling, ‘it was not an unselfish one, since, if Grace knew that her father had robbed mine, I verily believe she would have shrunk from me. She will now never know it. The memory of her father, if it cannot be what it once was to her, will at least be free from disgrace, and she will not, through conscientious (however foolish) scruples, be ashamed to take her husband.’

‘There is something in that,’ admitted the lawyer ruefully. ‘Walter Sinclair—for Sinclair is what you must still be called—you are a fine fellow, and I am proud to call myself your friend. It was a fond and foolish act, but it was a noble one ; and, since the mischief is done, perhaps you will be interested to learn that you are a public benefactor : failing your father’s heirs, Mr. Tremenhere’s money was to go to the Commissioners for the reduction of the National Debt, and now they will have it without even saying “thank you.” But at all events we can make them wait. Every week your marriage is postponed Grace will be putting by a thousand pounds or so ; of course your engagement will now be a very long one.’

‘It will seem so, no doubt,’ said Walter, sighing. ‘We are to be married in the spring.’

‘A very appropriate time, if we are to believe the poets,’ said Mr. Allerton cheerfully ; ‘but of course you don’t mean *next* spring ?’

‘My good sir, if I had my way, and dear Grace was herself again,’ said Walter, ‘we should be married to-morrow.’

CHAPTER LIII.

PEACE AT LAST.

NOTWITHSTANDING Walter’s lover-like impatience, or, as Mr. Allerton termed it, his stark, staring madness, his marriage with Grace did not come off till a considerable sum had accumulated for the

young people. Events of a very grave nature interposed between the cup and the lip. It had been foreseen, indeed, by Dr. Gardner that the intelligence of the loss of her sister, which had sooner or later to be communicated to her, would have a retarding effect on Grace's recovery, and this turned out to be the case; but there were other circumstances that helped to depress and distress her, and had she not had Walter's love to comfort her and the prospect of a happier future to look forward to, there is little doubt but that their cumulative effect would have proved fatal to a constitution already severely tried.

No news had come to hand of either Mr. Roscoe or his brother; the lake still held the remains of Agnes in its icy grasp; and while it was imperative that Grace should be removed from a spot so full of melancholy association as Halswater, it was arranged that she should leave home with Philippa (who needed change of scene at least as much as herself) for the Isle of Wight, but this could not be done without awakening suspicions and anxieties that compelled some explanation. Where were those three members of the little household—the sister for whom she still entertained affection, however ill-deserved; the friend of the family, whose absence was felt, if not deplored, in all domestic arrangements; and his brother for whom she had entertained so genuine a regard? It was absolutely necessary to tell her why none of them were present to wish her good-bye, and the consequence was that she left home a mourner, and more of an invalid than ever. A house had been secured for the sisters at Ventnor with a large garden overlooking the sea, while Walter took up his quarters in a neighbouring hotel. Notwithstanding what Mr. Allerton persisted in calling his 'gigantic sacrifice' (as if it had been a sale of goods), the course of true love was by no means running smooth. Indeed, at one time Grace's state of health became so serious that it seemed possible that the Burnt Million had been burnt for nothing—an apprehension which, if it did not move him to tears, brought the drops out on the good lawyer's brow.

The land agent at Halswater, whose place it had been Mr. Roscoe's intention that his brother should fill, was instructed to have the lake dragged as soon as the disappearance of the ice permitted, and the first result of that operation at the foot of the terrace walk was startling indeed. The grappling hooks brought to land—not one body, but two, and neither of them that which

they sought. They were those of the two brothers, 'clasped,' as the newspaper reports expressed it, 'in one another's arms.' It was supposed to be an affecting incident of fraternal love. Those who knew them well knew better. Mr. Allerton's explanation of the matter, at all events—and I think it was a shrewd one—founded on his own suspicions and on what Philippa and Walter told him, was as follows.

Driven to his wits' end by the failure of his plans and the concealment of a terrible crime, Roscoe had desperately conceived another—the murder of Grace herself; for that purpose, and not for that of self-slaughter, he had obtained the bottle of strychnine which was found in his breast pocket; this conclusion was the very one that Richard arrived at on hearing Philippa's story, and, furious at the danger that threatened Grace, he had sought his brother with the intention of taxing him with this intention and also of obtaining possession of the bottle. He had found him on the terrace walk, on the very spot where a similar catastrophe had occurred to Agnes, and a struggle had ensued in which both brothers had fallen over the cliff. The coroner's jury, however, returned a verdict of 'accidental death' in their case, as in that of Agnes, whose body was found a day or two afterwards, it having drifted for some distance down the lake.

The newspapers were studiously kept from Philippa, but the news had to be told her, and in due time she broke it to Grace. It was no wonder that the poor girl's convalescence was retarded; but in the end youth and love brought her forth from the valley of death.

Walter Sinclair was never suspected of having borne the name of Vernon, nor did that circumstance, since Grace was ignorant of it, affect the legality of their marriage. The transference of her father's fortune to the Commissioners of the National Debt was not even a nine days' wonder—for who heeds a drop in the ocean?—except with Mrs. Linden. That lady never ceased to have an imaginative interest in Josh's million, and to express her astonishment that no heirs to Mr. Vernon of Cockermouth were ever discovered. If she had been informed on affidavit that any human being had sacrificed such a sum, on the altar of Hymen or anywhere else, she would certainly have refused to believe it; but he who had done the deed never repented of it for an instant. The young couple have quite as much money as is good for them, and Grace can think of him who had been wont to call her 'his

little Fairy,' if not with the old trust and tenderness, at all events without the flush of shame. Mr. Allerton, who is a frequent guest of theirs, and has had many opportunities of contemplating their happiness, is compelled to own that in surrendering his place among the millionaires of England Walter has found ample compensation.

Philippa—a changed woman, and greatly for the better—resides within a stone's-throw of her married sister in the Isle of Wight, for Halswater Hall, with its sombre memories, has long passed into other hands.

In a fair garden by the sea there is a little toddler who has as yet but a single playmate, one who never quarrels with her or envies her the possession of her many toys. He is almost as great a favourite with her as he is with her father and mother; there is a tender association between them and him of which the child knows nothing. He passes his days on the sunny lawn and his nights in a well-lined basket at the foot of their bed, and, though he knows no more of the Burnt Million than the rest of the world, enjoys his master's fullest confidence and affection. On what slight causes hinge our poor human affairs! ‘But for you, Rip,’ says Walter gratefully, as he caresses the little creature, ‘I should, perhaps, never have won your mistress.’

THE END.

THE FARMER'S FEATHERED FRIENDS.

FIRST on the list stands that much-abused friend, the rook. Forty years ago he had a rough time of it in some counties : from morning to night there was little peace for rooks on any farmer's ground. In the flat counties they are called crows. Very few of the rising generation have ever seen a pair of the old-fashioned 'crow-clappers,' or heard their deafening din. I was very familiar with them in my youth, and have often played on them.

A 'crow-clapper' was a long-handled machine like a small shovel, the broad part of it about the size of a schoolboy's slate. To this was looped loosely a second piece of the same size. When this instrument was flourished vigorously the music (?) could be heard at a great distance; the greater the distance the better for the ears of the listener. Nor was this all : there was a vocal part besides, which it was expected the 'crow-keeper' or rather rook-scarer, should sing most lustily.

These simple country functions are almost things of the past ; many of them have gone, never to return. Those of them that belonged to our boyhood are apt to recur to the memory as life advances, when much that occurred in our early manhood is forgotten.

That doggrel verse sung by the crow-keeper I remember well, having shouted it myself hundreds of times :

Fly crow, eat your spoil, (spile)
While I sit down and rest awhile,
For you know if master happens to come,
You must fly and I must run !
Away crow ! away crow !

Now as this, when properly done, was sung to a quick march tune, the clappers marking the time most energetically, we leave the reader to imagine for himself the uproar. What rook with any self-respect could eat his meal within sound of such a combination ? He was fain to quit those large fields, forty acres though they measured, and betake himself to the less guarded upland pastures, although even there he had an uncertain footing.

No weak-chested lad had the least chance of getting that musical post of crow-frightener.

'Dang them warmints!' old Farmer Wills was wont to exclaim, 'they pulls the turf up. If some on 'em aint settled, there wunt be no feed fur the sheep. Go an' git the old double, an' kill some on 'em off.'

The worthy man had not the faintest notion that the birds were feeding on the larvae of the cockchafer that was devouring the roots of the herbage. 'Give a dog a bad name,' &c. Thanks, however, to the writings of recent field naturalists, these creatures that have been so long unjustly treated, now enjoy—many of them, at least—comparative security.

The rook is a specially industrious bird; he is up early and he does not roost until dusk; and when we consider that from his first flight in the morning until he roosts at night, he is continually clearing the fields and pastures from insects that would injure the farmer's produce, we must recognise him as one of the greatest unpaid benefactors of man. He steals some fruit, it is true. Nearly all wild creatures take a small tithe from man; it is only their due, for by their unwearied exertions they destroy those enemies, whose name is legion, that he could not combat without their aid. Only those who have lived with the birds all their lives, roaming about in the woods, over the fields and the waste lands, can form any opinion how much man is indebted to his feathered friends for his welfare and comfort.

Next to the rook comes the jackdaw, the shepherd's assistant. Whenever a farmer shoots one of these bright little fellows, he kills a sanitary inspector of, we might say, two or three sheep. The woolly creatures are his particular charge. Where you see rooks you will most likely see or hear jackdaws not far from them; not invariably, but generally. With the jackdaws you will find the beautifully-marked starlings. 'That is never a starling,' exclaimed a friend of ours, on being shown the faithful portrait of one of these birds; 'I thought starlings were all black.' And so think many who have not noticed them closely. If they were not such common birds they would be highly prized on account of their beauty and their aptness in acquiring various accomplishments. No British bird, not even the kingfisher, surpasses in its plumage the metallic beauty of a cock starling at his best. He is a glorious fellow, as he puffs out the feathers of his throat, drops his fluttering wings, and sings a love-song to his mate. His yellow bill is almost as bright as a blackbird's. A mimic of the first order, too, he is.

For several consecutive years a pair of starlings built in a corner of a room, in one of my homes. It was wonderful to hear the fine fellow sing to his mate in that corner, unheeding me, as I often sat quite near, busy at my easel. Apart from his own melodious whistling, he would run over parts of the songs of other birds for her delight, giving now some of the flute-like notes of the blackbird, as he sings in the spring evenings after a shower, just before the sun sinks low; and then again two or three notes of the storm-cock or missel-thrush would ring out, just as they come from his throat as he sits on the top twig of some wind-tossed tree, shouting in glee when the gale is at its highest and other creatures are hushed in fear.

After that would follow the 'spink-pink-pink!' of the chaffinch, and next the winter-song of the robin, his farewell to the dying year. All sung truly, without one false note. And then the odd bird would finish up by mewing like a cat. This was, of course, a wild bird; the starling in a state of nature is a thorough mocking-bird, as all know who have made a study of him in the country. The young ones are dull brown at first, of a peculiar shade. In spite of their vast numbers, and the very easy opportunities of observing them, some ornithologists have described them as solitary thrushes.

A large flock of starlings comes as a blessing to farm-lands where the stock are pastured. They delight to be on the backs of the animals, on their heads, round their feet, pecking and dibbling round about their muzzles as they feed. Here, there, and everywhere are the starlings; as the insects come in sight they have them, running on the ground or flying! I have often watched these birds hawking for insects in mid-air. The amount they destroy in a single night when they have young ones to provide for must be enormous; as one watches them come to their nests their mouths and bills appear to be crammed full. A nest of young starlings will keep both parents very busy from morning till night. When the cherries are ripe the starling will certainly have them if he has the chance, as indeed will blackbirds, thrushes, sparrows, chaffinches, and others. Insect and grain-eaters, all like cherries more or less. If you look at the bunch of birds a cherry-minder has in his hand when he leaves the orchard at night, you will be surprised to see what different species visit the trees. Those that are not able to swallow a cherry whole peck at it; the starling is not alone in this matter.

Looking at the matter all round, and weighing the harm these fruit-stealers do against the services they render in our fields and orchards, I say confidently the good outweighs the evil ten times.

Thank God! the woods and the fields are open to the poorest working naturalist to study in; so is the high road. Printed books are good, and helpful too; but the three greatest books given by God to man are free and accessible to the poorest student—the book of nature, the book of humanity, and one other book. And in them a man may read freely, as he has leisure, and be earning his daily bread at the same time.

To return to our feathered friends. You will see scattered about at various distances, wagtails—or dish-washers, as they are locally termed—the inseparable companions of the cattle and starlings. The common black and white, or pied wagtail, it is, as a rule, that you see in the pasture lands. Occasionally you may come across the beautiful yellow-breasted species, but not often; you will see fifty of the former for one of the latter. These pretty, nimble little creatures, so ‘peart,’ as our country folks would say, and lively in their motions, are fly-catchers. They trip and run in all directions round about the great helpless cattle, catching their small tormentors on their legs, bellies, and even from about their heads and ears. The stock would suffer tortures if the birds did not clear their ears out. Many of us know how a poor pony’s ears will be sometimes literally black with winged blood-suckers.

The wagtails brush and flick about with their wings as the creatures graze, and snap the flies that come out in all directions. Sometimes half a dozen busy wagtails will gather round about one cow or horse. Birds and animals understand each other, without a shadow of doubt. The friendly and practical little wagtail generally builds his nest in the farmer’s faggot-stack.

The wild pigeons come next on our list. These include the common ring-necked wood-pigeon, stock-pigeon or stock-dove, rock-dove or pigeon, also the turtle-dove. All four visit the cultivated lands more or less. I have heard men grumble about the harm done by these; but if you ask what definite mischief there was to complain about, you will fail to elicit anything worth listening to. I have kept close records, for many years, of their comings and goings in the heavily-timbered and well-cultivated southern counties, more particularly Surrey and Sussex, and have noted little harm done by them worth speaking of.

'They cum tu the fields, they gits in the corn, they gits all over the place, an' they spile the turmits.' This the farmer tells you as he stands inside the copse waiting for a shot at the pigeons. He knows where they come ; but he is very far astray as to their behaviour.

Two of the wild plants that are the farmer's worst foes, as weeds, are charlock—by him called chadlock—and the wild mustard plant. The pigeons search out and feed on these and on other ill weeds ; but 'they cum to my fields,' and that is enough. So do the butterflies and other beautiful creatures, but not to feed on the produce of his labour. The bill of a pigeon is weak compared to that of other woodland birds ; not at all fitted for digging or pecking to any great extent. Their swallowing power is very great, but most of their food is picked up from the ground. Of course the true reason so many are shot is because they are good birds to eat.

The turtle-dove is a bird of passage ; he is common enough in some parts of Surrey. I have seen from ten to thirty of them rise from the standing oats, or from the long grass in the hay-field, at one flight. One of my friends shot a couple as they were rising from the oats, and opened their crops. Not a single grain of oat did he find in them. They were full of a little vetch that grew abundantly at the roots of the oats, or, to express it in true rustic agricultural phrase, 'at the stam o' the whuts.' I was with the man at the time ; after that examination of the birds' crops he declared he would never shoot another pigeon.

Facts are stubborn things to deal with. Any one fond of wild creatures can soon form a most accurate and impartial estimate as to the amount of good and harm they may do, although the knowledge may not be gained in a year. Of course one would not say no harm at all is done. The amount varies according to circumstances over which the poor bird has no control—weather, or shortness of food, such as acorns and beech-mast. The trees do not always bear equally well, and then the creatures are driven to fill their crops with any green food that is not absolutely injurious. But wild pigeons, as a rule, get their living in the woods and on the outskirts of the fields. They form one of the most pleasing and familiar sights in our rural districts ; and to many of us, as to one of our best women poets, the 'cushat's ery' is dear.

The white rumpled rock-dove, or rock-pigeon, is not a common

bird in the southern counties. In the rocks by the sea they have their favourite homes. In the north, where the land in some places only grows oats in scanty patches, pigeons may do harm, for the very reason that they can get oats or nothing; but in the south of England it is different.

The sparrow, or 'spadger,' is a friend to the farmer, although he has from time immemorial done his best to exterminate that small bird. Happily for his lands, he has not succeeded in doing this. Although the commonest of our common birds, his ways of getting a living are still not very clearly understood.

He is caught in thousands for sparrow shooters, and by the trap. Then the farmers' sparrow clubs claim their hosts of victims. Besides which, sparrow pie, sparrow pudding, and roast sparrows, spitted closely on long sticks or skewers, are farm-house delicacies long remembered by those who have enjoyed them. It is not very often that the good dame can be persuaded to give her men folk a treat of this kind; for she very justly observes, 'Drat the little things! it do take such a lot o' time to get 'em ready.' But if once she makes up her mind for the job, all hands have to set to work to help her, both men and maids; and when the pie, with its light golden crust well bulged up with sparrows, tender and juicy, is placed on the table, eyes are wont to glisten and mouths to water and twitch in a state of delightful expectancy.

The town and country sparrow are the same species, but there is as much difference between the plumage of the two as there is in the outward appearance of the chimney-sweep and the well-to-do mechanic. Philip Sparrow's surroundings in town smirch and blacken his plumage. As to his habits—to begin with, he picks up almost any small trifle he comes across, nothing seems to come amiss with him. The hardy little fellow knows well how to take care of himself and to make himself comfortable. During severe winters in past years I have seen many birds that have been starved to death or perished with cold, but never a single house-sparrow. He attaches himself most pertinaciously to man, and, badly though he is treated, he will not leave him and his surroundings. 'Them there sparrers rewins things; them guseberries wunt hev' a pint o' fruit on 'em, the cussed things hev' pulled off every fruit bud as showed, mother wunt hev' no jam this year, cuss them!' Such were the sentiments expressed by one of our farmer acquaintances in my hearing. Strange to say, when the

fruit season came round, that particular year, he had a much heavier crop and larger fruit on his gooseberry bushes than he had gathered for years. When I twitted him with the fact, he simply replied that 'he couldn't mek it out, no how.'

Philip Sparrow bears no malice and sticks to the farmer. He even builds in his thatch or under the tiles of his house. If you have ever lived in one of those old farm homesteads, very early in the morning, if it is summer time, almost before the dawn, you will have heard him begin his monotonous and exasperating conversation—'Chip-chip-chip! chisic-chisic-chisic! chip-chip-chip!' By degrees the whole colony joins in. In the stillness of early dawn, when the farm is dead still, the noise to one unused to it is most irritating.

When they have their young the sparrows are most persevering insect hunters. All the day through, from morning till night, the cock bird continues bringing his mouth full of insects to feed his mate as she sits on her nest, or their young ones. For them he hunts the fields, the hedges, and the gardens. At the time they most need it, insect life in all stages, mature and immature, forms food for himself and his family. The aphides, those garden pests, he diligently hunts for, and he carries off a mouthful at a time. In the hay-fields he forages before the grass is mown; and when the long swathes lie there on the ground is the time to see the sparrows at their best. They go to the fields in flocks to capture the insects that swarm in and about the newly-cut grass. There is a small chubby brown beetle, locally known as the hay-chaffer, that they seem remarkably fond of; they will not leave the hay-fields so long as there is a chance of getting one.

When the corn is ready for cutting the farm lads are shooting all day long round about the outskirts of the fields, to kill the sparrow and keep him off the wheat, as they say. Now, one harvest time I owned a falcon and two owls; to keep these birds is a matter of care and no small expense, if you wish to see them as they ought to be, in full health and perfect plumage. My pets were not caged ones. To one of those sparrow-killing, or sparrow-scaring lads I applied, and I struck a bargain with him. He undertook to supply me with shot birds at so much a dozen, and to deliver them to me every evening at the feeding time. He brought me bunches of birds regularly enough, but there was never a sparrow in the whole lot. Nearly all were insect-feeding birds—a wheat-field swarms with insects at all times—but not

one of them was in any way injurious to the wheat. There is air, sunshine, and great warmth in a large corn-field—things which all insects need to bring them to perfection. The flocks of birds that rise from it are not there after the corn ; it is the insect life that attracts them. Fly-catchers and willow-warblers do not eat corn ; and yet, with the exception of one or two young chaffinches, it was of those two species the bunches of birds were composed.

Is it not possible for the beings that have been created with man as his companions to have fair play in God's world ?

The sparrows, with other birds, throng the fields in hosts just before and after the corn is cut. They pick up the unnumbered grains that drop from the ears in the field. That is their opportunity and they make use of it. If the Jews of old were forbidden to muzzle the great ox that treads the corn, shall boys be allowed to wantonly or unreasonably destroy the little creatures whose fall we are told the Allfather notes ?

Even after a month or six weeks have been passed by them in picking up the scattered grains, sharp as are those thousands of eyes, they do not pick up all, as you may prove by looking at any wheat-field that has lain fallow for any length of time after it has been reaped ; the blades will be springing up in all directions.

And so we think we have made out a fair case for persecuted Philip Sparrow.

The green plover, or lapwing, is another of the farmer's good friends. He not only forms a beautiful and interesting feature in the landscape, running over the fields and meadows, but, by his incessant search for those creatures that infest some lands, he confers on their cultivators more benefits than they appreciate. Being very wide-awake birds, happily for themselves, they do not get interfered with as a rule. To get the blind side of a flock of pewits wants, as they say, 'a lot of o' nooverin' (manœuvring) ; nine times out of ten the experiment ends in failure. So much the better for those on whose lands they come at various seasons. Plovers are largely affected in their movements by the weather.

The kestrel, the mouse-killing falcon, not only gets shot, but insult is added to injury, for he is nailed up to the end of the barn. The falcon glides and hovers all the day, and until late in the evening, catching mice and other small deer. The numbers of large short-tailed field mice, or voles, in some chalky upland pastures are simply startling. They are vegetable feeders, and when full grown are as large as a half-grown rat ; if you examine

the mouth of one you will see it is like that of the hare. These, with the fawn-coloured long-tailed field or wood-mouse, work sad havoc in farm gardens. The kestrel kills them day by day, as he hovers and fans over field after field. For this service he is made heartily welcome to a charge of shot. I have a dim recollection of a sage warning that formed a copy-slip in my school days, 'Put not temptation in the way of youth.' It applies to all ages, I fancy. If the farmer's wife had not placed her brood of chicks with their mother under the coop in the short mown grass in the paddock away from the house, the kestrel would not have spied them out, running to and fro, as he fanned over his mouse-hunting. The sight rouses his hunting instincts at once, and they are too strong to be held in check, choice Dorking chicks though these be. And if he is seen in the act it is enough to doom him and all his race for years to come; one chick that might never have attained maturity weighs down the balance of slain field-mice in hundreds.

There is one thing to be said, if one of the raptore gets killed another takes up his beat very quickly; so that in spite of himself the farmer has his winged mouse-hunter over his fields as usual. We have yet much to learn about bird life.

To the owls—the farmer's feathered cats we might call them—after all, we give the palm for usefulness and intelligence, although we have purposely put them last on our list. Without them all his efforts might be useless, for they prey on those creatures that work him harm in the night time. Besides what they kill and eat on the spot, or take to their young, they set by a store for some future time. By watching any pair that have settled on some farm you will find that from sunset to sunrise they go to and fro continually; and they never come to the nest without a quarry of some kind. The tide of public opinion is, I believe, turning in favour of the owl at last; let us hope it will bring protection to other creatures also.

MY PALACE.

HIGH over the lamp-post, high over the street,
Remote from the traffic, its rush and its beat,
'Neath a sky now o'erclouded, now sunny and blue,
I dwell in the stillness, my dear one, with you.

My windows are grimy, my walls they are bare,
A wreck is my table, a ruin my chair !
Yet I prize them far better than if they were new,
For they tell me, my dear one, they tell me of you !

Untroubled by visitors, tranquil I brood,
At the chimney-top's level folk seldom intrude;
And I heed them but little if ever they do,
For I'm talking, my dear one, still talking to you.

Then as dusk over gable and roof hovers near,
And the first star is faintly beginning to peer,
Half a song, half a sigh, the dim casement steals thro',
And the angel who breathes it, my dearest, is you.

TRISTIANE.

THE WOMAN WHO SPEAKS THE TRUTH.

‘WE are merrymakers on our way to the capital, whither we are betaking us for the Coronation feasts. I am Triflor,’ said the leader to the host, who stood still hesitating in the door-way. ‘Surely you have heard of jolly Triflor—blithe Triflor. And these (come forward, my children!)—my lord, the host of this fine inn is going to give us all a shelter for the night, because he knows that it is cold sleeping under the stars in the decline of the year, and he is a good gentleman who would not have the harmless amusing folks suffer—and these, sir, are—(forward, children!)—Hatto, who eats knives and smacks his lips over them, who can balance straws on the end of his nose, and make faces so droll, the sober water on reflecting them is forced to break into a laugh. Jael—who can hurl the big rocks, whom you may bind with new ropes if you will, and—crie ! erac !—a little stiffening of his massive thews—he is free again. Kahilde and Kabiong, the matchless dancers—so light of foot, you can afterwards cook in their sound shells the eggs upon which they have trodden. Tristiane—the woman who tells the truth—and Ib, tamer of wild beasts——’

As he spoke their names the members of that motley company stepped into the large, low, smoky room, lighted by pine boughs that were burning fiercely on the rough stone-hearth : Hatto, the juggler, slim as an ill-conditioned reed, with a long, pointed, humorous nose, and a hungry expression that lent verisimilitude to the leader’s report of his appetite for such food even as knives ; the strong man, short and bow-legged, with hairy wrists and a warlike demeanour, yet with eyes more mild than a calf’s ; the dancing sisters, pretty, and travel-stained, and weary, huddled together in a single cloak to keep one another warm ; Tristiane, the woman who told the truth—the host looked wonderingly, as she entered, at the great form in the dull scarlet garb, with the black wolf-skins hanging from her shoulders.

‘But what is *that*? ’ he asked doubtfully of the new apparition on the threshold.

'That,' explained Triflor, 'is the tamer, and that which he leads is the *tamed*.'

The host leaped backwards in the air as he recognised for a lion the strange animal staring at him with stern yellow eyes from the dusk beyond the door-way.

'Out of my house!' he cried, possessed with a wild dismay.
'Away from my door! Hold on to the beast—chain him up!'

'Oh, he is very, *very* tame, is it not so, Ib?' said Triflor with a smile calculated to disarm. 'Do not get angry; Hatto might tickle his nose with his straw, and he would only waggle his tail. Ib, put your hand in the beast's mouth—you see, he is as gentle as a lamb. He *was*, indeed, very wild, but our brave Ib has entirely subdued him. He will lie quietly under the table whilst we eat our supper.'

'There is a solid iron ring out in the empty ox-stall,' said the host, firmly unheedful of Triflor's demonstrations, 'he must go there. The tamer must keep guard over him, and the door must be safely barred. Snorro, show the man into the stall,' and with anxious precision he shut the door upon lion-tamer and lion.

Ib turned dully from the door, without a murmur.

The warm red glare of the pine-logs suddenly cut off from the twilight air made it seem darker and colder than before. He could hardly distinguish where he stood—that dark outline somewhat resembled the old baggage-waggon they took turns at dragging through the day; that yonder might be a well; and that other a horse-trough—where was the ox-stall?

'This way!' he heard a young voice at a little distance from him. He stumbled in the direction whence came the sound, drawing the lion after him.

He came to a covered enclosure that had long, wide openings at about the height of his shoulder. By contrast with the pitchy darkness of the stall those spans of open night appeared a milky blue-grey.

'The ring is on your right,' said the voice, still distant, but in another direction. 'Fasten the door, and I will bring you some hay to lay on the ground.'

In a few minutes an armful of hay came down upon his head. Looking up, he was able to distinguish against the sky a wild-haired, boyish outline.

'What is his name?' said the voice in a tone of deep interest.

'He has no name.' Then, with a sudden bitter vehemence:

‘It is a mortification of the spirit to be called by a name not yours, and, as I do not know what those other fierce kings, his brothers, used to call him in their language, I leave him unin-sulted by a lesser appellation.’

‘Now, me,’ said the boy, not quite understanding, ‘when they want me they say : “Snorro ! Snorro !” they say ; “get up, Snorro, go to work !” What I ask you is, when you want him to come——’

‘No need to want. I have him at the end of a chain. Go, child. Leave us alone. The lion wishes to sleep.’

‘I will bring him a marrow-bone.’ He scrambled down the wall, and the sound of his footsteps died away in the night.

Ib spread the straw on the cold ground and sat down upon it, so that the lion’s great, heavy head rested upon his knees. The yellow eyes glowed at him in the darkness. He passed his thin hands through the thick, rough mane, clutching at it with a fierce caress. ‘They have turned us away,’ he said, talking in incoherent murmurs to the brute, ‘because we look so dangerous and so bad, my friend. They are afraid of us. They do not know how cold and sad and sick we are. They say, “See the treacherous eye; see,” they say, “the gleaming fangs.” It would seem they wished to mock us—but they cannot know that, with the will, we have scarcely the power to attack the meanest cur that lives, we are so weary, so cold, so home-sick, so fallen—alas ! so fallen. Ugh, the loathsome world! the loathsome people ! How they laugh and shout at us when we come before them in fool’s gear, led in derision by a slender flower-chain, poor, despised, discrowned royalty ! They cannot see it burn, then, in the once proudly flashing eye—blear to-day—the remembrance of times when their faces had blanched with terror at the sound of a mighty voice, when their feet had been so bound with fear, they could not have stirred from the path. Now they say to us, “Come,” and we come ; “Go,” and we go. They lift an impatient hand to strike us, and we lower our lessened heads, submitting—we are so frozen and so forlorn. We have not strength now, no, nor spirit to resist——’

He put his arms round the lion, who was shivering with cold, and buried his face on the shaggy head. He felt a warm, moist touch repeated slowly again and again on his cheek, streaked with burning tears. Thus they cowered silently together.

The dark ether kindled slowly with tremulous points of fire. But what dim light entered the stall scarcely served to distinguish

the formless mass of man and lion closed in a monstrous embrace. Heavy, broken sighs alone interrupted the silence, and occasionally peals of distant laughter ringing from the inn, or a few notes, louder than the rest, from Triflor's shrill instrument.

'He is piping for the wenches to dance,' said Ib to himself, and at the sound arose in his mind a clear image of the whole scene—Triflor sweating over the music, with cheeks expanded to bursting, beating the measure with one flat foot; the girls dancing with slender arms intertwined, weariness lending a certain languid grace to their movements; Hatto looking on, leaning against the wall in his favourite attitude, one spindle leg across the other, his elbows pointed out jauntily from his hips, his head thrown back, his face distorted in a gleeful grimace, that exposed all his sharp, uneven teeth; Jael in a corner, diligently pulling at his stiff beard to keep himself awake, and nodding notwithstanding; the host and inn-people in ecstasies of delight over the unusual entertainment; Snorro, quite forgetful of marrow-bones and the like, holding his sides at Hatto's facial pranks; and Tristiane—the woman from the mountains?—he could not place her in the scene his vivid imagination painted. He had not known her long enough to be sure, without seeing, what her part would be in the merry gathering. Perhaps she was watching the fun and dancing, listening to Triflor's jests, without smiling. He had not yet seen her smile, and could only picture her face as wearing a look of calm wonder, or less than wonder—perhaps, calm curiosity; her eyes, used to resting upon dark mountain outlines and deep fir-forests swaying in the north wind, and turbulent mountain streams, expressing wild interest, but scarcely amusement, at such antics. Or yet, perhaps, with as calm disregard of the noisy proceedings, she had turned from them and sat gazing at the fire that flung her great majestic shadow upon wall and ceiling.

Ib drew from his satchel a piece of dark bread and offered it to the lion, who sniffed at it languidly and refused it. He bit at it himself, but it seemed too bitter food. He restored it to the satchel, and once more pillow'd his head on the lion's.

Gradually, with the course of hours, the merry sounds from the inn became less, then ceased altogether, and a deep stillness held the night.

Ib, wearied out with a long day's march, slumbered restlessly, waking every now and then with a start, and wondering wildly where he might be. Was that a dungeon in which he lay, await-

ing death? At the relief, remembrance brought beads of cold sweat out on his brow. He tried to keep awake to avoid the horror of dreams, but the weight of excessive physical fatigue drew down his lids in spite of his endeavour. He had finally fallen into a deeper sleep, and was wholly unconscious when a soft golden light dawned and grew slowly upon the upper portion of the wall and the rough beams over his head, lending each jutting edge a distinct dark shadow. A cock somewhere, mistaking the sudden light for the dawn, crowed lustily. At the shrill sound Ib started guiltily, as Peter may have done, and lay motionless, trembling. His fears had somewhat subsided, and he dared to stir a little—the rustling of the straw comforted him—as he lay wondering at the dim glory overhead, when he thought to hear a voice speaking his name: ‘Ib! Ib!—’

He did not answer. His heart burned and quivered within him.

‘Ib,’ said the voice once more. Then again, after a pause, ‘Ib, are you cold?’

Reassured, he rose to his feet and looked out into the night.

A late half-moon had just risen above the low level of the horizon, and hung there a great, dull, golden jewel. Its rays touched and brightened faintly one side of the figure that was standing without, but the face of it was completely in the shade. Still, from their great shadowy sockets Ib could feel the unseen eyes of Tristiane fixed upon him.

‘I came to bring you that’—she reached him the black wolfskins.

‘You are thanked,’ said Ib, receiving them. ‘Ib is not ungrateful.’

‘Why do you tell me,’ she asked quietly, ‘that your name is Ib? Ib is not your name.’

At the unexpected words Ib fell back a pace, paling in the dark. ‘You are mistaken,’ he said, with dry lips that almost refused their office, ‘I am indeed so called.’

‘Why will you lie?’ said Tristiane.

There was a pause, during which Ib heard nothing but his heart hammering in his ears. ‘Do you know,’ he asked finally in a hoarse, tremulous whisper, ‘what my name is? Speak low—in charity.’

‘No,’ said Tristiane. ‘I know only this, that you are not what you would appear. I know, poor soul, how wretched and heavy-laden you are. Your shifting eyes and hood drawn closely

over your ashen face have told their story to me—and your heavy footsteps, and voice without ring. You are too humble, too patient of blows, to be merely the low churl you seem. The sorrow I read in your eyes is too great for a contemptible soul. What have you to hide? My heart has cried out for pity at sight of you. I have yearned to assist you. Ease your soul of its secret to me. Tristiane, who never lies, gives you her faith, in face of all the holy stars, that no harm shall come to you through her, but that the burden that crushed you shall be made lighter by her helping you to bear.'

'Go your way,' cried Ib, in hot, frightened excitement. 'What have you to do with me? I did not call you—you are a stranger. You do not even seem one like me, but of a greater and goodlier race—go your way, go your way.'

And then, unaccountably, as he looked at her, it seemed as though on the utter darkness of his soul a door had been suddenly opened beyond which shone a little light. Bewildered with a tremulous joy at the bare thought of even such partial release from the tenebrous desolation that surrounded him, 'Wait, wait!' he cried, as she turned slowly to go. With wonderful agility he climbed the wall and leapt over it, and stood at her side. He clung to her hand. 'Your pity has prevailed,' he said. 'There is something in your face that calls for perfect trust. I am impelled to tell you, woman known one day, what through the changes of many moons I have jealously hidden from the very air of heaven—'

Then, struck by a sudden torturing thought, he broke short and dropped her hand. 'Alas!' he cried dolorously, 'but even you will shrink away from me when I tell you of the blood upon my hands.'

'No,' said Tristiane. 'I knew of it.'

'Then'—he again seized her hand—'come with me out of the moon.' He drew her hurriedly towards the shadow of the ox-stall. As they crossed the moon-lit space their shadows fell in strange contrast on the dark earth, one so simply drawn and large, the other so small and bent, with crooked knees and a fantastic head sunk deep between the shoulders.

'My name,' said Ib, almost in her ear, 'is not Ib, as you, who carry out the prophecy of ancient sagas, were aware as soon as my lying lips pronounced the word. I—am Magnus Magnusson—' He stopped, breathing hard. Then he went on more rapidly. 'That name, all unknown to you, is not so in the capital to

which our steps bring us daily nearer. When you are there you will, no doubt, hear it often enough, spoken—I do not know whether more in horror or contempt. Some one will point out to you the splendid lions hewn in stone on the steps of the King's palace and say: "Those were made by Magnus, son of Magnus," then, turning from them, will tell you a story of fame turned to infamy. But you will not believe me as evil as they make me—only so weak, so much weaker than they could conceive.

'You see, I was poor, obscure, cutting stone for miserable bread, when there rose in me, a low-born youth with nothing but a high-sounding name, a passionate thirst for honour and ease and the companionship of the great, to whom I looked up as to bright stars. Looking back on those days of my earliest dreams of glory, I try to think there was something generous, something not wholly ignoble, in me—but I do not know. I do not know. Inch by inch, steadily I rose, by the bare strength of a sleepless ambition. It was not easy for me, but I never ceased one hour from the whole effort of body and soul. From the common stone, finally, I made the perfect things you shall perhaps see. I gazed through the bars at the King's lions in their den, then formed their shapes in marble, gloriously idealised. I gained reverence through the hard-won skill of my right hand. I arrived at the greatness I had coveted. The King himself begged me to adorn his house with shapes of strength and beauty. Admiring men came to me and said humbly, "Master, teach us!" Clad in my new robes of dignity, I tried to forget, disown, the days when I had hungered unsatisfied.

'Among those who came to learn of me was one, a foster-brother to the young prince whose coronation we are going to see; he put his sharp chisel carelessly to the stone, and lo! it lived. What I had spent my youth and health in acquiring, some god had flung to him in reckless lavishness. A burning bitterness surged in my heart at sight of his work—a slow, consuming hatred of him. For I discovered in his eye a lurking contempt of me. It seemed to say, "The world knows you not, but I know you." It seemed somehow he was aware of the low origin I concealed, and the old struggles I denied as though they had been ignominious. He found nothing to respect in the long effort by which I had lifted myself from the level sea of insignificance, only something to laugh at in my petty weaknesses. I felt, though I never saw him do it, that he mocked, with the

strange cruelty of youth, the peculiarities of my person : my gait, that I had studied to make grave and dignified—my low stature had always been a vexation to me, but by my sternly erect carriage I had arrived at appearing almost tall ; my manner of speech, that I had not succeeded in rendering soft and polished as that of the inhabitants of the Court where I now figured as an honoured guest. He spoke to me as to a slave, that a freeborn man, out of his own nobility, refrains from calling “slave” ! I knew by some subtle sense, the property of morbidly sensitive vanity, that he held me up to the laughter of his companions and the women of the palace. I thought I caught sneering side-glances from their eyes, yet never anything I could complain of or appeal from. My life was poisoned. I was too small to rise above the intangible offence of their ridicule.

‘The King said to me one day, “Make me two bold lions to support my throne.” Then my enemy, who stood by, spoke—the dastard—from his high advantage, “Let the son of Magnus make one lion, and I will make the other.” The King laughed at his audacity, and said, “So let it be.” My hair was growing prematurely white with the toils of a storm-beaten life ; his face was blooming with its first golden down. There was a deep, refined cruelty to me in letting us vie together, whatever the issue of our emulation. I could not work well with so much stifled, corroding hatred in my heart. My mallet grew heavy, my chisel unsure ; the glory had gone out of my work. It was a botch. When I was forced to own that, I shed tears wrung from the bitterest humiliation. Then, like a thief, I slipped into the room where his statue stood, finished, as I had heard. Yes, his was all that could be wished. Now it would shine beside mine, my young pupil’s ! How every one would turn from mine to admire the perfection of his, and speak of it aloud before me ! In an access of uncontrollable rage I lifted my mallet—but no ! I was not so base—it was only the momentary evil suggestion of monstrous vanity. As I lowered my arm I suddenly perceived him standing in the door, beneath the half-drawn curtain. He stood there, the stripling, in all the insolent beauty of his youth, looking at me from between his half-closed golden lashes, his lips slightly curled in a smile. His face said plainly, “I looked to find him here, the peacock who hides his feet ! Fortunately, I am here in person to defend my work from his felonious hands. How amused the world will be to-morrow when I shall

tell of this: the great master who sneaks in at night to mar a rival's labour!" In an instant, before he could cry out, he was stretched on the ground at my feet, the scorn transfixed on his lips, my hammer driven so deep in his skull, I had afterwards not strength to withdraw it.'

The son of Magnus hid his face in his hands; his whole miserable frame shook with horrified shuddering at the remembrance of that scene. 'But the worst was not that,' he went on; 'not that I found myself a murderer; the worst was when, the deed accomplished, I found myself to be a coward. I, to whom the respect of others, the esteem of myself, was more than food or air, found myself trembling with abject fear of the consequences of what I had done. They would be fatal, I knew; for I had never been truly beloved, only borne with and respected for the sake of my talents; and now, who would find the least excuse for me, who conceive any motive in me but meanest jealousy of the gifts of that youth whose very faults had been as bright and bewitching as my only virtues were sombre and unattractive? No one would understand or feel the least poor pulse of pity for one whose sun had so suddenly gone down for ever. And then, unexpectedly, vile physical fear, such as I had, to that day, unproved, thought my nature incapable of, surged in on me and discoloured my lips at the thought of pangs the flesh can be made to suffer. Veiling my eyes from the sight of my victim, I slunk from the palace and fled into the night. From the moment I took on that vesture of fear I seemed to shrink in stature; and when, as part of my disguise, having shaved my worshipful beard, my face appeared to men as my internal nature had suddenly appeared to my own inner eyes, stripped of all charitable veils, my face showed the weak, mean mouth of a coward, I had worn hidden beneath the dense hair, even as my soul revealed the shameful weakness I had striven to cover and ignore. Homeless vagabond from that hour, unrecognisable in my humble guise, I wandered as far as possible from the scene of my fall, suspicious and afraid of every shadow by day, hag-ridden by night.'

'And lo! the strange colours my life takes on! When I had reached a place that seemed safe, comes across my path the lion that, from a seeming likeness to myself, my starving heart clings to—for is not he too an exile, he, too, debased from a high estate, a mockery of himself, weak and early old from the inclemency of Fate? And I must stay with him—a man cannot live wholly loveless!—and

with him a servant's servant to Triflor—no condition too vile for me now. And suddenly dies the old King, and Triflor sees good to be present at the coronation of the young Prince, and a horrible attraction draws me, too, back to the old haunts I have shunned—a strange excess of fear. For the habit of fear has grown on me. When I tremble now, it is with the accumulated terror of months. It seems to me that, if some one now in my presence were to speak of Magnus, in a very ecstasy of fright I should be forced to leap up and cry, "I am Magnus!" All else in me has been degraded and lost in that feeling, all the lofty qualities I boasted of in the days of my pride. Sometimes in the still of the night I try to remember what little good I, who thought myself not a bad man, really did in those days—and, alas! it seems so little that I doubt if I was ever good at all. And do you know what is my greatest torment now? That in thinking of the man I killed I always see his face as it was at his best and brightest. In his eye that persecutes me is no hatred, his lips wear no scorn, till I almost doubt he ever wronged me, and none of the justice, only the blackness, of my deed remains.'

Ib ceased, staring at the visionary face. The moon had gained on the shadow in which they had stood. Tristiane was full in the silvery light, but Ib still in the dark.

"And now," he said, turning to her once more, and there was a wild appeal in his voice, "I have told you what manner of man I am, I have placed my life in your hands—what will you do with my life? How will you, who have never done wrong, deal with me whose whole life has been evil?"

Then Tristiane said slowly, "I will be your friend. I will love you. I will shield you in all the days of your danger. I am strong. Oh, my wounded, way-worn brother, lean upon me and rest!" She held out her hands to him.

Ib did not take them, but stopped, startled and hesitating, as though suddenly in a dream something of peace and joy and promise of redemption had come into the night of his life and he feared to move lest he should wake; then, as his slow brain seized the value of her words, he fell forward at her feet, and clasped his arms about her knees, and hid his face in her garment, sobbing like a little child.

At dawn the strange caravan moved on southwards over the saddening land — beginning to wither and turn brown in the

autumnal air. Last of all in the fantastic procession came Ib, leading the lion, his eyes turning for ever through the weary marches upon the great figure of Tristiane, whether distinguished far ahead, seeming to help, with one careless hand, Jael with his waggon-load, or lingering behind with the foot-sore Kabiong. The unwavering devotion of his gaze still followed her when the light failed and she seemed but a shadow within the shade; and when at last they had reached a resting-place for the night and they might talk softly together a while, and his face rest a little upon her hands, the world seemed less a foe, and life less wholly accursed.

Day by day the little troupe neared the capital. At last, one evening at sunset, they came in sight of its towers glowing faintly far away in the dying red light. Triflor clapped his hands and shouted with wild delight. Ib felt himself grow cold to the heart. A black mist hid the distant prospect from his eyes. He stopped, overcome, and would have sunk upon the earth but that he felt the strong hand of Tristiane. He looked up at her. They walked on together without speaking.

The merry-makers came constantly in contact with other travellers approaching the capital by the same road. Now splendid companies of horsemen passed them—now groups of peasants in their holiday clothes.

The Feasts of the Coronation, which were to last seven days, were within one day of beginning, when Triflor, in his tinsel, for the first time stood on his little platform, clashing his cymbals to attract the passers' attention, and in the pauses of the deafening music inviting them to enter his booth and enjoy for a small consideration the wonders therein to be displayed. The crowd flocked in under the old curtain, eager to be amused—a lazy, happy, holiday crowd that laughed heartily at Hatto's tricks, and wondered with wide eyes at the ease with which Jael lifted huge weights and held them balanced in one knotty hand. The girls in spangled kirtles danced daintily before their admiring eyes, waving their long, bright scarves. Ib, with a faint show of trepidation, led forward the lion—who, worn out and impotent and half-blind as he was, still looked rather formidable—and astonished the lookers-on by placing his hand in the terrible red mouth of the beast, and making him leap through a hoop and perform other clown's feats. Then Kabilde led him around, the fierce desert king, by a flower-chain, to symbolise the

triumph of Love, Ib following her at a few steps' distance with a drawn sword to impress the people with a sense of her risk. The pallor of his strange, hollow face as he stood up before the many eyes, and the drops of sweat that appeared on his forehead as at a sudden wild wave of the lion's tail the crowd broke out in a loud cry, lent a touch of reality to his acting. The crowd gave a sigh of relief when he finally led the lion out of their sight.

Tristiane had been standing apart, idly leaning against one of the roof-supporting shafts, half hidden by the evergreens that for ornament had been twined about them, intermingled with bright berries. Carelessly, when Ib had vanished, she let her eyes stray over the heads of the spectators. They had been fastened for a few seconds on one, the only one there whose face, rising above the rest, was on a level with her own, when Triflor came up to her and suddenly drew the attention of the whole crowd upon her. He pointed at her with the end of his wand: 'This,' he said, 'is the Woman who tells the truth.'

Tristiane stood composed and unembarrassed under the scrutiny of so many eyes.

Suddenly some one at the further end of the booth broke out laughing. Triflor caught up the laugh. 'Ha! the gentleman laughs. He thinks such a woman should indeed be set up at a show like a strange and very rare animal. The manner of Tristiane, this truthful woman, however, is perhaps different from what the gentleman has supposed.' Then, addressing the whole community, 'Do you know the saying in the legend of long ago—that one who in all his days has not lied shall surely be able to tell falsehood from truth in others? That does my Tristiane. That her presence may not seem a reproach to the ladies here who cannot do as much,' he added apologetically, 'I will confess that she has lived, deep among the unpopulous mountains, a life of perhaps enforced innocence. To account for her superior size we must suppose her to have fed on strange fruits. Her fame as a seer reached me as I was passing through those parts, and, taking advantage of a sudden awakened instinct of curiosity in her concerning the world of smaller and less truthful beings, I was enabled to bring her thus far.'

From the statuesque repose of her face one might have supposed Tristiane quite unconscious of Triflor's words.

'Approach, approach, and put her to the test,' pursued

Triflor ; ‘approach—however clever you may be, you cannot hope to baffle her.’

The crowd came a little nearer, laughing faintly in wonder, not knowing exactly what to say to her.

‘Come,’ said Triflor encouragingly, ‘see for yourselves. Tell me, Tristiane, is it not so that I had some excellent sausages and cabbages for my early meal ?’

Tristiane shook her head.

‘No more did I. You see, ladies and gentlemen, she does not know that I had bacon and onions, but is sure I ate no cabbage.’

‘My name is Knut—is that not so ?’ asked a voice at her right hand.

She looked around at a strong sunburnt fellow with gold rings in his ears.

‘Yes ; Knut.’

‘And I peddle earthen pipkins in a great basket about town for a living ?’

‘No.’

‘But I plough and dig the earth, watering it with sweat, for a harvest ?’

‘No.’

‘Then, perhaps, I am a cook of my great Lord Sweyn’s, and fashion dainty dishes for his tooth ?’

‘No.’

The crowd showed signs of interest. Several broke in with questions. But Tristiane fixed her attention only on the man with the ear-rings.

‘Then I tell you finally. I live by water—carrying it in jars as it is wanted for the luxurious bath of some fair Court-lady.’

‘No.’

‘No ? Should you say that I was a seaman, then ?’

Tristiane nodded assent. The man started. A murmur of wonder passed through the crowd.

‘And my ship, the *Viking*, reached land last night ?’

‘Your ship ? Not the *Viking*.’

‘And we are not to spread sails again until the feasts are over, and young Erik established king over us.’

‘Erik the glove, and Sweyn the hand !’ said a voice somewhere in the crowd, that, however, no one heeded. ‘Erik the mask, and Sweyn the face.’

And now Tristiane was assailed with questions from all sides. Something of awe came into the faces of the people as she answered them one after the other; no question trivial enough to make her quiet eyes disdainful, nor so cunning and clever as to make her hesitate in answering. She stood looking over their heads with far-seeing eyes that seemed scarcely aware of them. Gradually the questions, asked at first with light, eager curiosity, grew fewer, and it came to seem a rather solemn thing to stand under those deep eyes and have untruth read in your face.

'Tristiane,' said a voice just near her, when finally silence had fallen on the people, 'now heed me awhile.'

She turned to the speaker, the tall man who had arrested her attention before; the only one whose eyes met hers from an equal height. He was dressed in a common garb, and, judging from that, might have been a common peasant. A fierce red beard hid the lower part of his face. There was a keen brightness in the light of his steadfast eye.

Tristiane returned his firm, large-eyed gaze; then, as he was beginning to speak, interrupted him.

'Why will you speak? Your garb is a lie. Your conduct is a lie. Those clothes do not belong to you, nor does the character you assume. You have no need to speak to be told by me that you are lying.' And then, more gently, as she looked at him whose eyes were on hers as steadfastly as before, unabashed by her reproach, 'What need have you to demean yourself? You are brave enough to keep true, and strong enough, and great-hearted and noble enough, as I can see.'

The booth was finally deserted; Triflor and Hatto and Jael went forth to seek what amusement or interest the city might afford them. The little dancers, weary, retired to rest. Tristiane remained with Ib, who had been left to keep guard over Triflor's possessions.

'I am crushed with the weight of memories,' he said to her. 'It seems but a day since I passed through these streets at night, a trembling shadow. I can still feel the blood upon my clothes. It had come to seem a little like the past, to have a little the dimness of a dream; but now again I feel the beat of my heart I felt in my earliest remorse, and I cannot free myself of the thought he must be still lying undiscovered beside his blood-bespattered masterpiece.'

Tristiane comforted him with her hand, laid gently on his

head in the dumb eloquence of pity too deep for words. He lifted his head from between his knees, and looked up at her.

'Your face dispels the vision,' he said, after intent gazing. 'Your touch makes my head cool. I can almost think sometimes that I have been forgiven, for your sake, because you have cared about my misery. When I look at you long—long—there seems to come to me a voice from somewhere far away that whispers to my heart a promise of peace, to be fulfilled some time—before I die, perhaps, or after. Surely it was a token of some relenting in Heaven towards me that you should come to me at the time of my most hopeless pain. You have lifted me a little out of the slough where I am fallen. From your complete courage I have gained this little strength: that I do not pity myself any more, but exult with a savage gladness that I have suffered so much, suffer so much, and can perhaps, at length, with my exquisite torture hope to pay my just debts and stand up a free soul again. Tristiane—Tristiane'—seizing hold of her, like a frightened child—'say again that you will not leave me. Sometimes, in dreams, my suspicious soul tells me that you have gone; and then when I awake, though it is still black night, it seems like the dear dawn when the thought returns to me, "I have you yet." You are the last spar to which a desperate man is clinging, who but for you must sink in a sea whence is never a re-arising.'

He clung to her arms as though indeed to save himself from death, his haunted eyes straining from their orbits. She soothed him as a mother her delirious child.

He grew quiet again at her words; and, being full of memories, went on in a rambling way to talk half to her, half to himself, of his old home and old friends, and old acts and thoughts.

'I wonder who now lives in the quiet house at the end of the street—the quiet street. I had a little garden enclosed by high walls. There was a fig-tree. There was a dark pool by which I used to sit and meditate. I could watch in it the reflection of the sky. I remember a little rosy sunset-cloud I saw melt away there one night. Swallows had built under my roof. I used to water a rose-tree. Oh, how could I love such simple things as I did, and yet be a bad man? How could it be, Tristiane? And my old brown volumes I used to read when I was tired of wielding the mallet; and my shapely lions that I made! Oh! if it could be,' he groaned, and

tears of yearning homesickness crowded in his eyes, ‘that I might find myself once more watching the rosy cloud float in the well of my own garden; that I should stand in my own walls, about each stone of which a thousand memories wreath, and hew into beauty the spotless marble, humming, perhaps, as I used; that men like myself might take me again by the hand and converse with me pleasantly of arts and dreams and destinies! I never loved my fellow-beings very warmly; there seemed to be an insuperable barrier between us, somehow. I was still a solitary soul when I lived in intimate communion with them; but now, how I could faithfully love the least among them—if I were only as I used to be—if I were just worthy to touch their hands! ’

Tristiane led him gradually to forget as he answered her questions concerning the city and its inhabitants and customs. She listened attentively.

‘And Sweyn? Who is Sweyn? I have heard that name twice to-day.’

‘He,’ said Ib, ‘is the captain of the king’s guards. We were not friends. I never liked him, by reason of the difference between us, and now I think I could love him for that same reason. He is in high favour with young Erik; an idle, ease-loving boy, Erik, beloved mostly for the sake of his father. I have heard say that Sweyn, no doubt, will wield the sceptre whilst the other wears the crown. He is worshipped by the people for his daring deeds in battle. He is great in body as in soul. The glamour of glory is about his name. He is a hero.’

Tristiane could not sleep that night for the many new thoughts that fermented in her brain. The long hours of darkness for her were painted with ever-shifting figures and scenes, through which shone one starlike idea, and illumined them all with clear, unvarying rays.

At sight of her on the following day, Ib was impressed with the set purpose in her face.

‘What are you going to do, Tristiane?’ he asked, in wonder at it.

‘Do not ask me, Ib. It is true that I have a deed to perform. I think, maybe, it was because I forefelt dimly that I was impelled to leave the quiet shepherd-folk and mingle with this strange great world.’

Ib looked at her with troubled, anxious eyes.

‘Where are you going, Tristiane?’ he cried, seizing hold of her

hand when in the evening she was about to go forth on her secret mission. ‘Do not go, Tristiane.’

Tristiane turned back with a smile that reassured him.

‘It is for the best,’ she said, and departed.

He walked up and down—up and down like a caged lion—as long as her absence lasted. Weak tears of relief came to his eyes as she stood before him again.

‘Oh, you must not leave me,’ he pleaded. ‘I feel as if I had lost you for ever each time you go from my sight. It is like suffering death over and over again. And to have you go, not being able to follow you with my persistent thought—I was all afloat in a black sea, Tristiane. Say you will not go again.’

But Tristiane shook her head.

‘I must, Ib. It is best.’

‘Oh, why have you secrets from me who have shown you all my heart? But no; forgive me, Tristiane. I will not complain. No, I am content; only say you will always surely, surely come back to me, and I will hold my peace.’

But his anxious eyes dogged her every least movement on the days that followed, and an unconquerable pain convulsed his face at her repeated absences. At her return each time, with redoubled silent fervour, he clung to the blessing of her presence.

‘You look so happy, Tristiane,’ he said once. ‘Your face wears a hopeful, expectant look. For what pleasant thing are you waiting?’

And another time he said with a sharp, sorrowful voice :

‘Do not look at me like that, Tristiane—as if you did not see me at all, but some one else beyond—as if some great person stood behind me, and I were too small and insignificant to conceal him in the least, and the sound of my voice were lost to you in rapt contemplation of him. Ah, Tristiane’—with sudden anguish—‘what has come between us? Sometimes now, though I hold your hand and see your face, I feel as though you were far away and lost to me utterly.’ But at the pained, startled look she gave him he went on penitently : ‘No—no, Tristiane, do not have any care of what I say. You know I am never quite in my right mind nowadays. Make allowances for me. No, nothing is true but that you have been good to me, and are not going to forsake me.’

One morning she found him labouring under a terrible agitation.

'Tristiane, I cannot hide from you what I have seen,' he said. 'Silence would strangle me. You must tell me what is the gold ring fastened around your neck.'

Tristiane instinctively lifted her hand to her neck, and felt the gold ring there stirred with the sudden wild pulsation of her heart.

'I was waiting for you to return last night, and as I waited sleep overtook me. When I woke, the first pale glimmer of dawn lighted the sky. I had not heard your footsteps as you came back, and for my peace I must make sure with my eyes that you were near. So I crept to where you slept, and was satisfied, and about to retire, when I distinguished by the faint light a glitter on your bare neck that could scarcely be a stray lock of your hair. I came nearer—I could not help it—and—whose ring is that great, golden, strangely-chiselled ring, that might fit the hand of Thor? For whom are you leaving me, Tristiane? Why are you deceiving me?'

There was that in her face when she said, 'Will you not trust me, Ib?' that made his anger vanish as mist.

'Yes, I will—I will!' he cried, with a passionate revulsion of feeling. 'You shall never hear another murmur from me. How dare I question you! I will trust you as far as death, and further. I will trust you as the true and steadfast stars that return every night for ever, and that it would be a stupid, blasphemous thought to doubt.'

'How your face shines, Tristiane!'

The great day had finally arrived. The whole population had flocked to the chief streets of the city to see the new king borne in triumph foremost in the glittering procession.

From where they had stayed quietly at home in the old booth Ib and Tristiane could hear faintly the joyous acclamations of the people, and the noises of pipes and drums. Ib had not dared to venture forth.

'How your face shines, Tristiane!' he had said innumerable times that day. Whenever he looked at her it struck him anew. 'Why does your face shine?'

But she had not told him. When he grew restless and excited at the noises without, she took his hand quietly in her own, and made him tell her about his old home, and the fir-tree, and the well, and the swallows under the roof. It always seemed he could never stop when he began talking of them.

'How would it be with you,' said Tristiane, turning her shining face away as if her secret must appear written there, 'if one should say to you, "You may go back to the old house. The past shall be forgiven, the dark days forgotten. You shall sit again under your own trees and watch the peaceful sky reflected in the well of your own garden?"'

'Do not say such things to me,' cried out Ib, in anguish. 'You were never cruel before. Do you not see that you are torturing me to death?'

Tristiane was silent, but she pressed his hand hard to her side to keep from speaking.

'How your face shines, Tristiane!—how your face shines!'

It seemed to her the light had never been so long in fading away before. She came to the door and lifted the curtain certainly a hundred times to see how much the sun had declined. Finally the red glow began to narrow in the clouds, and left them grey. The streets were again full of the people that had before been massed together in the heart of the city. The merry-makers got home, Triflor bursting with food for conversation. The lights were lit in the booth; everything was made ready for the nightly performance, sure to be attended by great crowds on such a holiday.

Finally, that too was over.

'Do not leave me to-night,' said Ib, holding Tristiane by the hem of her garment. 'I am so filled with strange fears and forebodings. My heart stops at every sound. I need to know that you are near to live through the night.'

'I will be back in a little while. Do not ask me where I am going. I cannot tell you—not yet. It may be, you too will be glad to-morrow. Good-night.'

The sky was full of stars. Tristiane walked on hurriedly. The streets were still alive with people; it was too great a holiday to go to bed. She proceeded without hesitation, as going over well-known ground. Finally she came to the King's dwelling. She showed a ring at the palace-door, and was led in unquestioned. Passing through the corridors, her ears were met with mingled sounds of music, and wassail, and laughter. They grew less as she approached a well-known chamber far apart, and when she had entered it, and the heavy bearskin curtain had dropped behind her, she found herself again in perfect stillness. Her heart was beating loud with emotion. She held her glad eyes fixed

upon the door opposite the one through which she had come. She had not waited long, though it seemed long to her impatient spirit, when the curtain was suddenly lifted.

Tristiane moved one quick step forward—then stopped short and stared in dumb, pleased wonder at the man who had entered.

She had seen him before: once, the first time, in peasant's attire, for it was the tall man with the red beard, and many times since in plain soldier's garb; but never him nor any one arrayed with similar magnificence.

A long mantle lined with costly furs, snowy and soft, fell in stately folds from his shoulders. His purple tunic was bordered with gold. A heavy roll of twisted gold, the two meeting ends of which were beaten in similitude of lions' heads, curled around his powerful neck and betokened his exalted rank.

His face, in unison with his apparel, that night had assumed a sudden splendour. His vigorous head and crisp long hair shone like burnished metal. His eyes had the steady gleam of jewels; his great brow the purity and polish of some precious marble; his lips a more vivid purple than his garment. An inward fire of gladness, a mighty purpose, seemed to have lent his heroic stature almost god-like proportions.

'Welcome, Tristiane,' he said to her, approaching.

'And is it Sweyn?' asked Tristiane, abashed, for he scarcely seemed the same man she had importuned so many days with her insistent prayers.

'Even Sweyn.'

'You wear such a glad visage to-night. I know that you have gained of the King the pardon I have asked. Is it not so? The son of Magnus may return to his home, and have restored to him his wealth and his work, and something of the old peace and the dignity that is more to him than air to breathe? Is it not so? Ah, you are good—good—good.' Tristiane, with impulsive gratitude, seized his hand and bent to kiss it. Sweyn withdrew it quickly.

'I am glad to-night, but not for that, Tristiane,' he said.

Tristiane uttered a faint cry of sorrow, and the shining light went out of her face. 'You have not obtained it yet? And I must come again, and still again and again! Do you know how many times you have said "Come to-morrow" to me? How many times I have come here burning with hope and gone away chilled with disappointment? I thought that this should be the last.

You promised to aid me. I saw in your face that you had truly that intention. Are you not so powerful with the young king as they say? Ah, surely I thought to hold his pardon in my hands to-night, written out fair and clear. I thought to have taken it home, and to have wakened him where he slept with the lion, and have shown it to him. How he would have wept for joy on my shoulder! O Sweyn—oh mighty, magnificent Sweyn—how long must I wait for that? One day would be so much gained from desperate wretchedness! Why do you dally?—of whom they say that but to ask of the King is to obtain?

Sweyn smiled slowly, fixing his strangely bright eyes upon her as he spoke. ‘Tristiane, you of the wise, truthful eyes, are after all the simplest woman in all the world. The first silly wench from the street could answer that question of yours. You can see men’s spoken lies in their faces, but have not, it appears, the gift of divining evident truths left unuttered. Why am I slow to answer your petition, and eager to let you come here night after night to learn from my lips how your suit is advanced? What is the fate of Magnus to me? But your presence within my doors is more than the interests of this vast realm.’

Tristiane stared at him blankly, not understanding. ‘But you are going to get Ib’s pardon for me?’ she faltered; ‘you are going to do as you have promised!’

Sweyn laughed. ‘Ah, how simple you are! how simple you are! You are like the great pine-trees of your mountains, and the grand grey rocks, and the pure cold wind, and the deep-blue mighty elements! What an ever-renewed delight you are to me, Tristiane!’—the laughter passed from his face, and his eyes were intensely earnest. ‘Now forget for a moment that petty coward, not worth the breath we use to speak his name, whom out of your own generosity you would wish to save, and listen to me a little. I am Sweyn. I have fought many battles. I have seen death close in the face and smiled at it. My name is one that makes the enemy’s blood stand still in his chilled veins. I am a king in all but the name. There are thousands who will do my will at a sign. I can choose to-morrow a bride among the most beautiful and noblest in the land—and yet, until I saw you, I was as lonesome as a creature of which kind only one has been placed upon the earth. I have been friends with men, and yet not of them. I have led, commanded, made use of them, been above them. And so my life has been

cursed with a hidden want. But when I saw you first—when to satisfy the young king's freak we had gone forth on a merry-making time—something in me cried out at the sight: "You have found your peer." Your frank eyes looked straight into mine, used to looking down into others' eyes, and your soul shone out from them in its fearless, stainless attitude. A simple majesty breathed from your quiet lineaments. I distinguished an awful beauty in them—you are so greatly, strangely beautiful; the common herd, too dull and blind to recognise gods when they walk among them, do not even suspect your beauty! I said, before leaving you, "She shall be Sweyn's bride"—and yet I had not resolved what my next movement towards you should be, when I learned that you had urged to see me. I wondered what you would want of me. There was something sublimely laughable in your petition—you cannot be aware of it, being unlike any one else; I was staggered by the touch of greatness in your simplicity, that made you come and trust the cowering lamb to the generosity of a bloodthirsty lion, relying upon a bare word of his not to harm it, but to save it from the other lions. There was something unanswerable in the high reasons given by you for mercy and pardon—something fatal to argument in your complete ignorance of mean and revengeful motives. Ah, you are not cunning like other mortals. You say exactly what is in your mind—you either have no knowledge, or else a noble disdain for sinuous courses—and my soul bows to you, Tristiane!"

Tristiane stood like a statue, and listened to his words without averting her puzzled face, that had turned by one faint shade paler as he spoke.

"Tristiane," pursued Sweyn more hotly, and coming nearer to her, "you shall never leave me now. You do not understand. Sweyn loves you. Sweyn has chosen you for his bride, for it is fit a lion should have a lioness for his mate. Sweyn has despised for you all the artful, accomplished beauties of the Court—for you, grown like a perfect tree among the wind-blown hills. The proudest in the land shall bow to you, the mistress of Sweyn, who is prouder than any, and yet himself bows before you. Oh, beloved—your lashes are like a line of sunlight across the great august eyes, darkly blue and deep like the sea. In possession of you, my goddess, I am myself uplifted and made a god. I am joyous as they, transcending all human powers of gladness, since I can hold your great and gracious body in my longing arms, and

call you Tristiane—*my* Tristiane—my beautiful, beloved Tristiane.'

The young warrior came towards her with outstretched arms, his eyes shining with a wonderful brilliancy, not far from the fervour of passionate tears, his firm lips trembling for once with an unspeakable, perfect tenderness.

Tristiane watched him with troubled, fascinated eyes. A sudden beautiful softness, even as a reflection from his, came into her face. She did not seem able to move—but when she felt the first slight touch of his hand, as though suddenly awakening, she cried out, 'No, no, you must leave me, I must go to Ib.'

'Never again, Tristiane. You shall forget Ib. What is Ib? I hate him. He shall have his pardon, the cur, but you shall never see him again. I will teach you to forget him. We will be happier together than mortals had dreamed to be. We will live in more than human splendour: I in the divine radiance of your face, you in the light of my tremendous love—that will force from you a similar love in return. Do you think you will not love me as I love you? To-morrow, I tell you, Tristiane, you will give me throb for throb—because we were made for one another. I recognised you, marked you mine, as soon as my eyes met yours. You are my own by right of the stars, of my birth, of my strength. Sweyn has always conquered! And he holds you now, and you are his for ever—but you have turned pale—you have become so cold.'

'Let me go,' said Tristiane. 'I am standing in the dark, all in the dark. Only this is clear. I must go back to Ib. I have promised never to leave him. He cannot live without me. His life has been so sad! Let me go.'

'No, no,' cried Sweyn, vehemently, 'I abhor the very thought of your past contact with that man. He shall never lift his base eyes upon you again. Is it not enough that he shall be pardoned for your sake?'

'Let me go. You must let me go. He will die if I leave him. He needs me. He has only me in all the world. I am true to him for ever.'

'You will forget him, I say. I will *make* you forget him. How dull you are, Tristiane, and ignorant and cold! Do you not know, Tristiane, that you shall love me? That it is not possible for an immense love like mine to awaken no answering love in the beloved? That your only home is my arms, your resting-place my heart?'

'No, no, no!' cried Tristiane, in strenuous protest, shuddering away from him. 'I do not know what you are saying. But I am going. I am going back to Ib.'

She moved to go, but he caught her without a word before she could reach the door.

'Stay,' he said, in a command that was still an appeal.

'I am going back to Ib.'

'You shall stay,' he said fiercely, between set teeth, losing his head.

His terrible strong arms were around her. Their faces were within an inch of one another. Her eyes glowered sternly into his beneath her stormy, gathered brows. Each could feel the other's quick, angry breath fanning his hot face.

Then began a mighty struggle. It was a contest as between two lions of equal powers and courage. Without a sound from their lips, but occasionally a sharply drawn breath, they strove together for a few seconds, she for freedom, he for mastery. Suddenly, with a cry of triumph, she broke from his arms and made a step for the door. He overtook her, and held her fast again with a burst of hoarse laughter. She felt a death-like sense of cold creep over her, realising the uselessness of her efforts.

Sweyn stared for a moment in her fierce, unyielding blue eyes, then with a sudden impulse he flung her from him. 'Go—go back to your son of Magnus!' he cried, out of his mind with blind wrath. 'I renounce you. What have I to do with a woman rigid as stone with resistance of me? I demeaned myself to strive with a woman—but you have driven me mad. Go, go back to your shameful lover!' he shouted with an increase of unreasoning rage. 'You would have saved him, but I tell you that you have sold him. Mark me in this. He shall be taken and put to some terrible death before your eyes. I myself will tear him limb from limb, yes, with my own hands. Do not imagine that he shall escape justice—or revenge call it now more properly. There is no hole on earth so small he can hide in it from me. Go, go now, if you will,' and he dashed from the room.

Tristiane stood still, stunned. Her arms dropped at her sides. The room swam before her eyes, then all grew blank before them, and she reeled stupidly to the door.

She knew not how she reached the open air, but suddenly she found the stars above her head. The keen, cold wind restored her to her senses, that had seemed failing. With labouring heart

and trembling feet she hurried on in the direction of Triflor's booth. Everything was hopelessly confused in her mind. She seemed walking in utter darkness. Only this was clear to her: that she must hurry—hurry—and take Ib away somewhere and hide him. As the thought of his danger pressed harder upon her she started to run. An occasional drunken song met her ear. Once or twice she missed the way and had to retrace her steps. The night made everything look unfamiliar.

It seemed to her she had been wandering about the city for many hours, when she finally reached what she thought to be the street she was looking for. Yes, she remembered it. The booth was at the other end. She hurried as much as it was possible into the almost utter darkness, for the torch placed in an iron ring at the corner had burnt itself out, and the starlight was dim. Now she stood on familiar ground. There was the booth. All might yet be well.

She felt her hair rise on her head with a sudden mortal fear as she entered the enclosure. For in advancing she stumbled over disorderly masses lying about the ground. Then she became aware of the stars above her head peeping in through the broken roof.

‘Ib! Ib!’ she cried out, and began groping madly about among broken, ruined things. Suddenly her hand met something soft and warm—the lion. Ib, then, must be near.

He lay by the lion—quite still. She shook him and called to him.

He drew a long sigh. ‘Tristiane?’ he asked faintly, as though awaking from a deep slumber. Tristiane fell on her knees beside him. ‘What has happened, Ib?’

‘Ah, is it you? Thank God it is you!’

‘What is it, Ib? What has happened?’

‘What know I?’ he said feebly. ‘A brawl—a drunken mob. They set out to tear down the place—for fun. All fled. I was afraid to go at first, and then something fell across my legs and I could not, because I was so faint. It is there now, and holds me down. Can you lift it?’

She lifted the beam; he crawled from under it.

‘Can you stand, Ib?’ she asked. ‘Can you walk? Oh, Ib!’ she cried out in a voice of most piercing anguish, ‘we are in danger; we must fly—to-night—this minute—and I have brought this upon you! Oh, do not ask me—I cannot tell you. For

the sake of pity, do not ask me. Only this: we must fly. Whither? I do not know—only away from this city filled with our enemies. Come, come, Ib.'

But Ib had sunk again to the ground. 'I am hurt, Tristiane. I cannot walk. We cannot fly. No matter, Tristiane. I have long expected it. Don't be so distressed. I was lying in a stupor a little while ago, that seemed like death, and it was such peace as I have never known. I think I could lie still here to-night and let them come that seek me, and kill me if they would—and call it a relief. A beautiful, grand denial of all the past it would be—would it not, Tristiane?—to meet my death like a man in the end, after having shunned it so long like a hunted hare,' he asked; and then, in a whisper, 'Are they looking for me?' And through an exquisite sympathy she could feel the fever of fear that had come back upon him in spite of his courageous words. Tristiane did not answer.

'Are they looking for me?' he asked again.

'Oh, Ib, I will save you yet,' she cried out, 'I will save you yet.' There was not a moment to lose. She stooped and gathered him in her arms—a light weight, scarcely more than a child's, he was so wasted away with sorrow and pain and fear. With a sigh of relief he let his head drop on her shoulder. He felt so safe in those strong kind arms.

She stood still a moment, hesitating—where should she go? Then, as a sudden light came back to her mind, the thought of Knut and his boat, that was to sail as soon as the Coronation feasts were over, the last day of which was about to dawn. Knut, for the sake of Kabiong's sweet eyes, had been a frequent visitor at the booth; and Tristiane, scarcely listening, had heard long accounts of his boat, anchored at the mouth of the river. In a rapid whisper she told Ib of it. They could not venture to follow the fertile, populous river road, but must travel to their destination over unfrequented downs along the desolate sea-coast.

'You know the ways: direct me,' said Tristiane. She moved to the door, and came again under the open sky. 'The lion!' said Ib, sorrowfully. Without a word she turned back. The lion was standing straining his chain after Ib. She unfastened him and led him along. The three went forth into the darkness.

At daybreak the city was far behind them. They had reached unimpeded the verge of the sea. When the light made things

distinct, Tristiane, who from the first dim glimmer of dawn had been glancing anxiously behind her, to make sure they were not followed, stopped and let Ib softly on the ground. They dared not travel in the daylight on the exposed bare high-land ; one least mischance would be fatal, Tristiane felt, and she would not risk it. In a little hollow, veiled by a few ragged bushes, they lay all day, Ib with heroic forbearance refraining from questions concerning their flight ; for which her eyes rendered him grateful praise.

When the darkness had come on again Tristiane arose and resumed her burden. Ib seemed heavier than before, for she was faint with hunger and consuming agitation. She had not dared to beg for bread ; they must vanish from the land like shadows, leaving no trace of their passage. Ib, exhausted, slept fitfully in her arms. She plodded on and on, unwearied and watchful. Now and then, at some least unaccountable sound, she felt a tremor pass over his body, and her heart beat wildly against her breast for pity.

'Oh, be not afraid, Ib. I am with you. I am strong. Indeed, I will save you. No one can reach you but through me.'

Over the desolate downs they went by the faint light of stars. She carried him tenderly as a mother might, having a care of his hurt limb. A little late moon gave them its light for a few hours. Tristiane set her face to the wind, and progressed rapidly, rapidly in the direction of the river-mouth. Occasionally for a minute she felt the numbness of extreme fatigue creep over her, and her foot dragged ; but there arose in her mind the memory of Sweyn's infuriate face and threatening words, and she went along more rapidly than ever, with quickening breath, a grim determination in her face that frowned darkly on the darkness. Glows of painful heat swept through her frame at the ghastly image of what must follow their being overtaken. But no. She would save Ib—Ib, whom she had betrayed ! And at the thought of her fond treachery—alas ! how she had striven to do the very best for him!—a great yearning to make compensation to him made her cry out again, 'I will never leave you, Ib. I am your slave. I will watch over you every hour. I will be with you until death. Oh, have you not told me of some beautiful storied place where there are more flowers than here, and the air is balmy, and the sun shines in a sky continually serene and more deeply blue than ours ? Have you not, Ib ? We will go there ;

we will travel, travel, travel until we reach it. The boat will take us as far, perhaps. We will not rest until we have touched that shore. I will carry you so in my untiring arms. Then, when we are once there, we will lie down on the soft grass and listen to the birds without speaking. We will remember the past only as a troubled dream. Oh, Ib, Ib, say that it shall be so! Say that you can still be happy!"

Ib looked at her long with his grateful eyes. The dream was too beautiful.

"Among these people that speak another language we shall be alone as in an enchanted place. Tristiane will have to be your world at first as well as your servant. I will strive to be enough, indeed, Ib. I will heap up pleasant leaves for you to sleep on; all that shall be when we have reached the boat—if we can just reach the boat we shall see this shore fade away like smoke. We will say good-bye for ever to this old house, and begin life all over again, turning our eyes to a new and fairer, that will hold great peace for us two poor pilgrims!"

She felt a tear from Ib's eyes fall upon her neck. A strange flood of tears blinded her own eyes—the first she had ever wept.

"Oh, Ib," she cried out in great torment, "forgive me! forgive me! No! spare me—do not ask me for what. Hush!"

She stopped short and dropped to the ground.

A noise of horses' feet. A group of horsemen came in sight, their bright torches flaring in the wind, and shedding about them a strong bloody light. They stood still not far from the place where the three had cowered down in the shadow of a stunted tree. They seemed to consult together for a minute. They held their torches high aloft to light the downs, and gazed anxiously about. Tristiane held her breath, choked by her heart. Then they galloped on, and were soon lost to sight behind the unevenness of the ground.

Tristiane arose and took up Ib and moved onwards again, walking with set teeth. The strain was beginning to tell upon her. Her even breath was drawn deep and hard. Ib, weak and sick, slept. She knew not what thanks to make for that unexpected blessing of sleep that had fallen upon him. He was saved the agony of uncertainty that racked her as they went, went, went along the high cliff overhanging the sounding sea. They must be nearing the mouth of the river now. In a little they should be safe. An anticipated exultation curved her lips.

Suddenly she heard again the trampling of hoofs. She bowed down over the earth, shielding Ib with her body. Another troop of horsemen rode by holding high their torches. They were evidently in search of some fugitives. An overpowering feeling of intensest hatred made Tristiane grind her teeth. How he had kept his word! how cruel to the core he was! with what joy he would do all he had threatened, and more! how he would hound them to death with his bloodhounds, and laugh when he had them at bay! with what keen vindictiveness he would relish her horrible pain, in the slow, hard death he would inflict on the shrinking body of Ib!

She put her arms protectingly around him, and all the fierceness and doggedness of a lioness aroused in defence of her young fired her blood. By all that was holy in heaven and on earth, he should be baffled yet! She arose again and went on along the unresting sea, dragging the tired lion.

A feeling of despair, the first yet known, came over her when another troop of horsemen rode by. She bit the ground for rage and sorrow as she lay on it waiting for them to get out of sight. The enforced delay might be fatal; already the sky was paling.

When they had passed she went on stolidly: she *would* save him! But a feeling of cold was in her heart on account of the thousand ghastly suspicions that dimly crowded about her brain, and that she had not the courage to face and consider. Ib was heavy as lead; a dull stupor had come over him from pain and weariness; his head hung helplessly on her arm. All at once, the whole weight of the truth coming upon her, she halted. Of course they would be taken. His people—for they must be his people—would lie in wait at all the ways. They should be cut off from the port, and driven to the sea. With the courage of desperation she shook herself free from the fear that was about to paralyse her, and walked on bravely, for the sake of one possible chance of safety—for she must do something.

The stars went out one by one; the dread dawn came on relentlessly; slowly it whitened in the East.

They must be quite near the river now. The boat, no doubt, would leave on the high tide; the tide, she judged, was about half in. On the high cliff, against a palely roseate sky, appeared the great form of the woman, burdened with the wounded man, leading the lion—the great, gracious, generous form.

Suddenly, far ahead, her keen eye caught sight of men on horseback standing still. She shaded her eyes and gazed fixedly at them. Yes, his men! He had done his worst; he had cut off the way to the ship. Then she looked behind and thought to perceive more men coming on from there. Then, suddenly, in the far distance at her right hand she caught the movement of many vague shapes. So it had all been in vain—the long march, the almost unendurable strain, the trembling hope! Fool, to have thought to escape *him*! Had he not warned her? ‘Sweyn was never conquered; Sweyn never sues; Sweyn seizes his own.’ So, they were in Sweyn’s hands at last!

She turned her face to the sea. There was no place to hide now from the broadening day. She laid Ib on the ground, and sat down beside him, with his head on her lap. The doting old lion crouched by him, and licked his hand, very feebly, once or twice. Tristiane watched the sky slowly deepening in colour where the sun was going to rise. All was over now—they had only to wait. Her eyes falling on Ib’s face, they filled again with those unfamiliar human tears. As it lay, turned to the dawn, the soft light seemed to alter and enoble it; the large, intelligent brow wore a look of almost seraphic beauty; the weak mouth showed only an excessive tenderness in its pale lines; the hollow eyes were filled with peace; the wind that blew in his soft thin hair, pure white now at the temples, made it look like rays of light. A great hot tear from Tristiane’s eyes fell upon his cheek. His eyes opened and looked up into the gloom of hers. ‘Ah, we are resting,’ he said vaguely. ‘It is good to rest—good to rest.’

His eyelids, weighed down with somnolence, opened and closed again a few times, then finally opened wide, and were fixed upon her with infinite love. ‘I have been dreaming beautiful things. I had forgotten what we were about. Are we nearly there, Tristiane? But no, I do not care. I feel like a little child again. I am quite, quite safe wherever you are. You said once, “Rest upon me.” You see I have, Tristiane. You are so strong—so great and strong.’

Not strong nor great then as she sat looking away from him, far out to sea, forcing back the stream of her tears to its burning bed. Her dust-tarnished, dew-drenched head had a dreary, disordered look. The old god-like calm of her face had given place to an expression of simple suffering humanity.

'Tristiane,' said Ib finally, after a long pause, 'I have thought just lately that maybe my life was not made all wrong for me after all. I call back my curses against fate. Maybe it was best for me that I should be hurled off my high pedestal of self-righteousness, and, finding myself in reality so much less than the stature of a man, should strive to gain a manly height. Surely striving, whether a man succeed or not, will count for something in the end. I think that as I am now—I think—I hope—and yet cannot altogether touch myself—if I were put back where I stood when I for the first time discovered myself wanting, I could stand up and pay willingly the penalty of a crime.' They both gazed silently at the sky for awhile. 'And then I have you,' he went on. 'Without all that pain and horror I should not have had you, Tristiane. I think you have made up for it all. It was worth such suffering to find such pity under the skies. I think perhaps for you I would live it all over again—the pain, the horror, and—yes, the crime.' And with more love and gratitude in his face than could ever be conveyed by words, he said softly, 'How shall I ever thank you, Tristiane! O my patient, compassionate Tristiane!'

His eyelids dropped; he dozed again before Tristiane, who was searching her mind for some little word to say, could speak at all. Thank Heaven that he slept!

She turned and looked around. The party from the right had come nearer. She could now distinguish the mounted men one from another. The light was so bright they must be able to see her now, and Ib, and the lion. Yes, evidently they had been spied. The men came on quite rapidly over the uneven, difficult ground. One great horseman led the rest. She knew him even from so far away. He threw his bridle to the wind and advanced at headlong speed. Turning again to the sea, she saw a little ship flying over the dark waves with full white sails—the same, no doubt, in which they were to have escaped.

And now the great rider was within hearing. She could not bear to turn and see him advancing with his conquering mien—to watch the massive outline growing more distinct, and the terrible revengeful face and the unfaltering eye.

How sweetly Ib slept! Suddenly she stretched her hand to his throat—one slight effort of the strong, merciful hand and he need not fear Sweyn. Not pain, not death, ever any more—one effort of that hand and— But no, she could not do it,

No, there was nothing to do—nothing.

With her last strength she rose to her feet and confronted the rider; then the sense of the approaching danger and death for her sleeping friend overpowered her. She threw up her arms and sank down beside him, vanquished, and buried her blanching face in her knees, for there was nothing to do—nothing. The steel might pass through her body first, but Ib would be reached in the end, even as Sweyn had said. No, there was no hole so small on the face of the earth in which they might have hidden from him.

A voice like a clarion rang through the misty morning air.
‘Magnus, son of Magnus! Magnus, son of Magnus!’

Tristiane felt Ib tremble violently. She looked up. Ib was half-raised on his knees staring with starting eyes at the rider, now quite near. His face was ashen and quivering.

The great voice rang out again clear and sonorous. ‘Magnus, son of Magnus! The ban against thee is called in. Thou art pardoned of King and country. Thy goods are restored to thee. Thy rank is thine own again. Praise to the King who sees that mercy is good !’

Ib stared at him, still quivering. Then slowly, slowly, a great smile irradiated his face, at the same time glorified by the newly risen sun. He stretched his hands out uncertainly, and groped in the air a moment, and fell backward on the ground with a sigh, his face smiling vaguely up at the suddenly illumined sky—the face of one who has died of a joy too great.

And Tristiane and Sweyn, who had arrived on the spot and leapt from his saddle, stood gazing at one another over the frail, miserable liberated body with the joy-lit face. Her eyes were ringed with shadows dark and sad like death. His too were sleepless and feverishly bright, staring from a haggard face. All the world lay steeped in the sweet red colour of the new day. They gazed—gazed, without words, till Sweyn cried out in a voice harsh and broken with emotion, ‘Oh, why did you think the very worst of me? Why did you believe all that I said? I have been seeking you all over the land ever since.’

And across the broken barriers of hatred and injustice, Tristiane, her face full of unutterable prayers, held out her hand to him.

CONCERNING THOMAS.

THE reflective mind must often have been puzzled, in the fitful intervals of a mazy existence, by the gigantic problem—How is it that, while Tom is so common an object of the country in England, France should be so comparatively rare in representatives of Thomas, and even Spain, Portugal, and Italy should have so scanty a crop of Tomas's, Thomé's, and Tomaso's? This grave doubt must so long have agitated the public conscience of Europe that I feel no compunction in saying the moment has at length arrived to relieve the world from any further tension on so painful a subject. In order to put an end to such a lamentable state of international uncertainty, I come forward with confidence to throw myself into the breach, like a modern Marcus Curtius, as the historian of Thomas.

For even the Christian names we all bear so lightly are none of them mere fortuitous collocations of chance syllables. Every one has a history and a meaning, often important, and always full of unsuspected interest. Take Thomas itself, for example, as a characteristic case. How curious that the name of the doubting Apostle should have become a favourite designation for men and boys through a considerable fraction of united Christendom! At the present day, to be sure, in this age of agnosticism, Thomas is a very natural choice indeed for the parents of such doubters as Professor Huxley, who happens to bear it, or even for such luke-warm Laodicean philosophers as Henry Thomas Buckle and Thomas Carlyle. But how, in the ages of faith, did any good Churchman ever come to bestow upon his innocent offspring the name of that incredulous saint who insisted upon the production of some sort of evidence before accepting the account of a most tremendous occurrence? The wonder, after all, is not that Thomases should be so comparatively rare upon the Continent nowadays, but that any Thomases at all should ever have been permitted to grow up anywhere. We shall see hereafter, however, that the anomaly has itself its sufficient explanation. As usual, there is reason in the roasting of eggs. For the present, I shall content myself with pointing out the simple fact that there were no Thomases in England, at any rate, before the date of the Norman Conquest.

That in itself is not very remarkable. Everybody must have

noticed that there were no ‘English’ Christian names, as we would call them nowadays, anywhere in English history before the Battle of Hastings. John, Robert, Henry, Thomas, Richard, Roger, Guy, and Peter—in fact, the common assemblage of English society generally—all came over, as might naturally have been expected from gentlemen of such high respectability, with William the Conqueror. Before the Conquest, the true-born Englishmen bore without exception those uncouth and unpronounceable crack-jaw names which we now condescendingly describe as Anglo-Saxon. To be sure, these are the only true English names in existence—the only ones formed directly from English roots, and smacking of the soil, where those roots grow as naturally as dandelions or daisies: while all the rest that we bear nowadays are in the lump High German or else Hebrew by origin, as much aliens in the land as the Carolines and Augustuses, the Alexanders and Dagmars, that have come over in later times with Teutonic or Scandinavian princes and princesses. Most of these true old English names were ugly enough in all conscience; take *Elfthryth*, for example, as a charming title for the heroine of a novel, or *Godifu* as the original of our modern Lady Godiva. But, pretty or ugly, they all went down together as soon as the Normans came: the native Englishman, with genuine British snobbery, no sooner felt the heel of the Williams and the Henrys pressed firm upon his neck than he took his revenge—how? Why, by christening his own ignoble Saxon brats William and Henry, just like their Norman overlords. Even so the despiser of our bloated aristocracy in the East-end at the present day sends Percy and Bertie to the Board School round the corner, while Gwendoline takes out Leopold in the broken go-cart, and Gladys stops at home in the general living room to mind Algernon and peel the potatoes.

Wherever a name of this first and genuinely English crop did struggle through somehow into the middle ages, it was in virtue of being attached to some saint’s personality. Thus we owe the existence of Edward and Edmund in our midst to-day to the casual accident that those particular names happened to be borne by the two sainted early English kings—St. Edmund, of Bury St. Edmund’s, the martyr of East Anglia, and St. Edward the Confessor, enshrined in state in his own great Norman Abbey of Westminster. Henry III., the saintliest of our Angevin princes, had a great respect for these two beatified kings, his predecessors; and besides rebuilding Westminster as we now know it in honour of one of them, he bestowed their names respectively on his own

royal imps, Edward I. and Edmund Crouchback, Duke of Lancaster. Thus the two got enrolled in the royal circle, and were eagerly adopted, as usual, now that royalty patronised them, by the English people who had so long discarded them as so awfully common. Wherever else, and that is but rarely, an old English name of the sort survived in the middle ages, it was for a similar reason ; as when St. Æthelthryth, the patron princess of Ely, after undergoing Latinisation in the form of Etheldreda, declined at last into the vulgar village Awdrey. Tawdry finery still keeps up the memory of the gewgaws bought at St. Awdrey's fair.

I fear, however, that, like the original possessor of the gross of green spectacles, I begin to digress. This discussion on the fate of the good old English name of pre-Norman days seems to bear at first sight but little relation to the veracious history of our special subject, Thomas. Nevertheless, I hope to arrive at that more modern personage all in good time. When William and company invaded England, Thomas also came over in their train. By remote descent, of course, he was a good Syrian, for Thomas the Apostle took his name from the Aramaic tongue : in which abstruse language, as I am credibly informed—for I don't myself speak it with any approach to fluency—the word Thomas, like its Greek equivalent, Didymus, means simply a twin. In fact, tradition has it that the Apostle's original name was Judas, but that, to avoid confusion with two others of the same name, he was more generally known, like Peter, by his conventional sobriquet. Legend further relates that in later life the doubting saint atoned for his early scepticism by carrying the Cross to India, where he underwent martyrdom in due course, as in duty bound, and became the founder of the little outlying island of the faith whose representatives are known as the Christians of St. Thomas. Nor was his tomb forgotten. Alfred the Great sent an envoy to the shrine of St. Thomas in India in the ninth century. Long after, when the Portuguese found their way to Malabar round the Cape of Good Hope, they discovered the body of the Apostle at Meliapore, and transferred his relics to Goa, where the doubtful bones of the doubter now repose in high honour under a costly canopy. San Tomas is accordingly the patron saint of Portuguese India.

But, in Europe, the sceptical Apostle long remained exceedingly unpopular. The Johns, the Jameses, and the Pierces outnumbered him by the dozen. Still, as a saint and martyr, he had necessarily his day—the 21st of December ; and children born

upon that day were always liable to be named by devout parents after its patron. Hence it was, no doubt, that three great mediæval saints happened to be called Thomas, and that after them, in one country or another, such a crop of Thomases gradually sprang up to occupy the soil. Those three, in chronological order, were Thomas à Becket, Thomas Aquinas, and Thomas à Kempis; the first of whom is both most important in his effect upon nomenclature in general, and most personally interesting to Englishmen in particular.

The great English saint was the son of Gilbert, portreeve of London, and his wife Rohese; and his being christened Thomas gives us one more example of the rapid way in which the native English nomenclature was supplanted wholesale by foreign types or saints' names after the Conquest had rendered the Æthelstans and Godrics of an earlier day as unfashionable or even ridiculous as Sophia and Jemima in modern Britain. His surname of Becket, à Becket, or atte Becket (that is to say, 'by the streamlet'), he derived from some little beck or diminutive brook that flowed near his father's house in London. During his life he was probably the most popular man in England; and after his brutal murder in Canterbury Cathedral he blossomed out at once into a saintly martyr, the representative to the down-trodden English race of the cause of the people against their kings and nobles. It was that democratic sentiment that made the shrine of St. Thomas at Canterbury the focus of so many pilgrimages 'from every shire's end of England,' as Chaucer phrases it. It was that, too, that turned the old British tin-track along the ridge of the North Downs into the Pilgrims' Way, and that caused thousands of votaries to hurry along it annually, 'the holy blissful martyr for to seek,' at the very spot where the king's minions had slaughtered in cold blood the helpless champion of the Church and the people.

With such a saint to recommend it, no wonder that the name Thomas spread apace, like Jonah's gourd, in every part of England. Most of the churches of St. Thomas scattered up and down through the country are under the invocation of the archbishop, not of the Apostle, as Miss Yonge rightly remarks: and St. Thomas's Hospital was originally founded on the site of the house in which the great Churchman was born. How early Thomas had become a familiar Christian name in our midst we can gather from the fact that Tom was already its recognised diminutive in the days of Piers Plowman, who talks of 'Tomme Trewe-tonge' as a proverbial personage; whence it may be inferred that the

designation, ‘Truthful Thomas,’ was not first invented to suit the idiosyncrasy of the Sage of Chelsea. Gower, too, in his curious description of Wat Tyler’s rebellion, which contains a perfectly charming collection of mediæval English nicknames, writes in the delicious dog-Latin of his period :

Wattē vocat, cui Thoma venit, neque Symmō retardat
Batque et Gibbē simul Hikkē venire jubent.

A passage in which the acute reader will not fail to distinguish the remote progenitors of Watson, Thomson, Simpson, Batson, Gibson, Hicks, Watts, Simms, Gibbs, and many other pure and blameless ratepayers of the modern metropolis.

Nor will it have escaped his attention, in like manner, that Thomas, in the act of passing into Tom, has dropped his ‘h,’ which is at least written, if not pronounced, in the fuller and official form of his designation in most modern languages. This may excite surprise on the part of those who imagine that a weakness in the matter of aspirates is a purely modern and Britanic peculiarity. Nothing could really be further from the truth. That unoffending letter has puzzled the vocal organs of all nations and ages. Even Catullus’s Arrius, the lineal predecessor of our familiar ’Arry, stuck on ornamental aspirates with heedless profusion where they were least needed : and the middle ages, which turned Theodore into Teodoro and Hadrian into Adrian, took their revenge by writing Antony as Anthony, and by transforming Esther into the more euphonious but less correct Hester. Let us remember that France, though it still writes its ‘h’s,’ never really pronounces them at the present day, even when they are by courtesy called aspirate ; and that Italy has got rid of them altogether, in writing as in speech, so that it realises already the wildest cockney ideal of progress in the English language. Therefore do we praise Italian for its soft and pure liquidity, while we pour out the vials of our wrath and scorn on ’Arry when he faithfully imitates its rigid avoidance of ‘arsh and ‘ard consonantal gutturals.

So, at any rate in mediæval England, while people wrote Thomas they said Tommas ; and when they shortened the name down to its first syllable, in accordance with the true genius of the English language, they allowed it to emerge as the simple familiar Tom. Italian, oddly enough, does the exact opposite, cutting it down to Maso ; whence by further diminution Masaccio, as who should say Tommy, and Masaniello for Tomaso Agnello.

Tom’s descendants are fairly frequent in the land. As

Thomasons, to be sure, they run scarce, though I have met with that form; but as Thomsons and Thompsons, Tomsons and Tompsons they abound like blackberries. Had it not been for Tom, in fact, the seasons might still have gone unsung; electricity would lack some of the brightest jewels in its scintillating crown; surgery would be deprived of its deftest hand; and the ingenious Count Rumford, *né* plain Benjamin Thompson, of Massachusetts, would never have founded the Royal Institution. Then Tom itself gets further diminished by the addition of *kin*, and becomes Tomkin; as John becomes Jenkin, Simon Simkin, Walter Watkin, and William Wilkin. Hence Tompkins, Tomkins, Thompkins, and Tomkinson. Once more, there was a politer diminutive, Thomsett, which survives as Tompsett in Essex and some other adjacent counties. Tomlin, Thomlins, and Tomlinson are also 'on my list:' while Mr. Thoms, who invented centenarians, with many other Thommses, Tomses, and Toms, shows a still simpler form of the identical patronymic.

Occasionally, Thomas by itself is a whole surname, as in the case of John Thomas, the sculptor of 'Una and the Lion,' or Ambroise Thomas, the well-known musical composer. But in Britain at least these simple forms of surname, consisting of the Christian name alone without alteration or addition, are invariably Celtic in origin, that is to say, either Welsh, Cornish, or Highland Scotch. For, in Wales, a man generally bore till very recently but a single Christian name, as Evan or Owen, and was further distinguished from others of the same mark by the distinguishing addition of his father's name, as Evan ap Rhys or Owen ap Llewelyn. Owing to this cause we have almost always four alternative forms of almost every Welsh surname: simple, as Evan; possessive and Anglicised, as Evans; truly native, as ap Evan; and corrupted, as Bevan. Similarly with Owen, Owens, ap Owen, Bowen; Rhys, Reece, ap Rhys, Price; Hugh, Hughes, ap Hugh, Pugh; Richard, Richards, ap Richard, Pritchard; Howell, Howells, ap Hoel, Powell. Prodger stands in like manner for ap Roger; Pumphrey for ap Humphrey; Bethell, for ap Ithell; and Probert for ap Robert. George, Henry, William, Williams, and Harry are common surnames everywhere in Wales and Cornwall. Their prevalence and their very simple modern form proves the late introduction of the English surname system into Celtic Britain.

I have only once, however, met with Ap-Tommas as a modern surname, and that is in the case of the gentleman who is

known as the Queen's harper. I confess I view this picturesque name with some covert suspicion, as being a trifle too theatrical, like Fitz-James and Fitz-Edward: but it certainly has Apjohn, Upjohn, and Apgriffin to keep it in countenance.

As for Tommy, I consider him a vulgar little modern boy, wholly beneath the dignity of philological inquiry: and I have so often heard him requested, in the English of Stratford-atte-Bow, to 'make room for his uncle,' that I think he may now be fairly regarded as quite unfit for the society of ladies and gentlemen. Whether he was the same unpleasant child who afterwards grew up into that most objectionable creature, Tommy Dodd, the rival and contemporary of Champagne Charlie, history informs us not. Still, I must admit that Tommy occurs as early as the fifteenth century, though even then the company he kept was indicated by the common conjunction of Tom, Dick, and Harry, who have ever since been faithful companions. Little Tommy Tucker, who sang for his supper, may probably go back at least as far as the age of the Tudors.

And that reminds me that in Scotland, too, Thomas went over the border with the first Norman adventurers, and was early naturalised as Thomas of Ercildoune, alias Thomas the Rhymer. North of Tweed, however, he generally shortened himself into plain Tam, under which form he achieved a notable popularity as Tam o' Shanter—now the milliner's name for a flat broad hat, based originally on the blue bonnet of Scotland. His introduction into Ireland was more directly dependent upon the immediate relations of the martyred archbishop. One of Becket's sisters, in fact—a nice girl—married a De Boteler, and receiving large grants of land in the newly conquered Pale (I suppose as a solace to her wounded feelings), became the ancestress of all those sturdy Thomas Butlers who ultimately rose to fame as the Ormonde family. It is seldom indeed that an historical Christian name can be traced so clearly to its origin in saint or ancestor.

A further proof of the popularity of Tom in early times is afforded by the large stock of words and phrases he has indirectly contributed to the wealth of the language, and of which tom-eat, tom-boy, and tomfoolery may be taken as fair examples. In this respect, to be sure, he cannot for a moment enter into competition with the ubiquitous Jack, who has supplied us with jack-boots, jackdaws, jackasses, and jackanapes, as well as with boot-jacks, screw-jacks, meat-jacks, and bubbly-jocks, not to speak of jockeys, jackets, jack-snipes, and jack-of-all-trades. Still, in a fair

Civil Service examination, Tom, I think, would make a good second. It may be worth while, perhaps, to glance briefly for a moment at two or three of these his many secondary avatars.

Why Tom should have been particularly selected by our amiable ancestors as the name of a fool nobody on earth now knows. ‘Poor Tom’s a-cold,’ says Edgar in ‘King Lear’: but then, Tom-fools were well known long before Shakespeare’s day, and Edgar’s use of the title is merely his practical way of showing that he accepts the position of fool in sober earnest. In Chaucer’s time it was Jack-fool, not Tom-fool; while the French equivalent, Pierrot, passes the compliment on to the devoted head of Peter, who is thus once more openly robbed to pay Paul. It must surely have been in Scotland that a somewhat similar character assumed the name of merry-Andrew, a gentleman who still frequents country fairs, where he is often to be seen in the congenial society of cheap-Jack. Tom-fool, once well established, gave rise to tomfoolery; though, since the days of Grimaldi at least, the person in the pantomime who deals out that commodity has been more commonly known by the sobriquet of Joey. In the Elizabethan drama, however, the clown or rustic is most often William—whence, perhaps, Tom-fool’s more recent counterpart, Silly Billy, who has replaced Simple Simon in the fickle affections of British childhood. Still, even in the spacious days of great Elizabeth herself, we come at least once upon Tom Snout, the tinker. And Tom, Tom, the tailor’s son—who, in open defiance of both morals and grammar, stole a flute and away he run—must be a person of considerable antiquity in the annals of our language. At the present day, Tom’s place in nature has for the most part been unjustly usurped by Hodge, who was once Roger, when ‘writ large,’ and whose surname is popularly supposed to be Chawbacon. But sound the trumpets, beat the drums; hark! the conquering hero comes! For sure enough, as soon as Hodge accepts the Queen’s shilling, he reappears once more, transfigured and transmogrified, in full regimentals, as Tommy Atkins. *Sic itur ad astra.* Tom-fool enlists, and goes where glory waits him: and, lo, he returns as Sir Thomas Atkinson, K.C.B.—while Thomas Babington Macaulay inscribes his name with much dignified eulogy upon the page of history!

Tom-cat introduces us into very different society. He belongs to a large group of animals who have adopted the Christian names of their betters, often only in the end to roll them in the mire.

In the donkey tribe, the respective sexes are Jack and Jenny ; but a jackass is understood by philologists to be a term of opprobrium in use among costermongers. In the case of goats, we get the curious variant of Billy and Nanny : to butt like a billy-goat is a familiar accomplishment, perhaps allied in origin to the other graces of Silly Billy, to whom I have alluded already in another connexion. But cats are either Toms or Tabbies, the latter epithet being derived from Tabitha, a name supposed to be peculiarly suitable to the patroness of cats, the spinster lady of a certain age, without whose benign intervention, as Professor Huxley has shown, cats would become extinct, harvest mice would multiply, bumble-bees would be devoured by thousands, and purple clover would cease to set its seed in England.

Tom-tits are so called, I believe, because of their diminutive size : for Tom-Thumb sufficiently shows us that stature is not the strong point in the descendants of Thomas. But this view is difficult to reconcile, I confess, with 'Great Tom of Lincoln,' or that other big bell which gives its name to 'Tom Quad' at Christ Church, and rings one hundred and one times at nine o'clock every evening, to recall the truant undergraduate to the shelter of his college. Perhaps, however, 'Tom of Christ Church' derives his name from his pious founder, the great cardinal, whose hat is still the emblem of the house. On the other hand, the noisy bell of Westminster is known as 'Big Ben,' the modern form of which name betrays that tinge of vulgarity that so often accompanies recent nomenclature, in contradistinction to the fine robust manliness of the old English nicknames.

As for Tom Noddy, he was already famous long before Barham conferred upon him a courtesy title and put him into the Peerage as the Lord Tom Noddy who went to see a man die in his shoes—in the lilting verse of Mr. Thomas Ingoldsby. Peeping Tom of Coventry, who looked through his lattice as Lady Godiva rode down the street 'to take away the tax,' must belong by his name to a late mediæval version of the city's ancient legend ; for, of course, no contemporary of the real historical Leofric and Godgifu could possibly have borne such a cognomen as Thomas. Rather would the churl of that remote period have been called by one of the euphonious and melodious names we get in the pedigrees of the 'boors' who were serfs on an estate in Hertfordshire—Dudda, or Wulfsige, or Alfstan, or Dunne ; with their wives Deorwyn, and Golde, and Tate, and Deorswith—all of whom were 'inborn at Hatfield,' though 'Aethelbeorh, Seoloce's son, sat at Walden.'

That is the sort of person, if anybody, who, compact of thankless clay, would have lost his eyesight in the vain attempt to spy upon Lady Godiva's spotless purity. A Tom could only have come to Coventry in the generation after St. Thomas of Canterbury was murdered. But, as you may see his effigy, even unto this day, peeping out of a sham window in a street of Lady Godiva's own town, the fact if not the name must be above suspicion.

To say the truth, the vogue of Thomas as an English Christian name came in with Becket, and to a great extent went out with the Reformation. Henry VIII. did everything in his power to obliterate the memory of the great rebellious saint, before whose altar Henry II. had been compelled publicly to humiliate himself in a ceremonial scourging. But the Tudors were not made of the stuff that goes to Canossa. Henry regarded St. Thomas of Canterbury in the light of an enemy of the royal prerogative. The Defender of the Faith, who first proclaimed himself Supreme Head of the Church in England, was hardly likely to admit the claims to martyrdom of an archbishop who had died in defence of his order against the aggression of the Angevins. Becket has therefore no place in the reformed Calendar, which scrupulously recognises all royal holiness, giving a day not only to the Translation of King Edward the Confessor, and to St. Edmund of East Anglia, but even also to that made-up saint, Edward, King of the West Saxons, whose so-called martyrdom at Corfe Gate in Dorsetshire was wholly due to political and personal motives. Nevertheless, it is a curious coincidence that Henry's principal instrument in pulling down the fabric of Papal power in England should have been Thomas Cromwell, and that the chief victim of his sanguinary policy should have been that noblest of English Churchmen, Thomas Wolsey.

From that day to this, in spite of Tom Hood and many other worthies, the name Thomas has steadily declined in relative popularity. Perhaps the reason for this may partly be that, unlike John and William, Henry and Edward, no Thomas has ever sat upon the throne of England. Nor have Thomases flourished very largely either in the Royal Family or in the higher nobility. At the present day we know John Thomas mainly as the aristocratic flunkey, whose alias of Tummas, immortalized by Mr. Punch, has probably cast the last stone on the cairn that will hide, ere long, the mortal remains of an extinct but once ancient and honourable appellative.

TO MY CANARY.

O LADY BETTY, pert and bold,
 In dainty gown of palest gold,
 And fine pink stockings showing ;
 To me your eyes so round and bright
 Recall some other eyes to-night,
 Black eyes, too, just as knowing.

You eat and drink with mincing geste,
 But only of the very best,
 With waste of seed unlawful ;
 And though forsooth you think you sing,
 Your voice is but a sorry thing—
 And *her* top notes were awful !

You treat your mate with proud disdain,
 Although he tries your love to gain
 In simple honest fashion.
 Your prototype was just as stern,
 But trodden worms, you know, *will* turn,
 And love outlive its passion.

Ah ! Lady Betty, take your ease,
 And flirt and twitter as you please ;
 Your life is brief and sunny.
 I sit alone and watch you here ;
 The other Betty ? Ah ! my dear,
 She married—and for money !

LIFE IN DAMASCUS.

A RESIDENCE of some years in Damascus made me realise in a peculiar manner the force of the words used by the sweet psalmist of Israel when he said in the twenty-third Psalm, ‘He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.’ Here, in our own favoured country, we are accustomed to the almost continued aspect of green hill and dale. Our winters are seldom so cold or our summers so hot as to deprive us for a long time of the sight of green lawns and trees, and the running rivulet and silvery lake form generally a pleasing accompaniment to the scene. ‘Oh,’ said a young lady to me on the deck of a P. and O. steamer as we neared the shores of England, ‘how glad I shall be to see dear old England again ! It is two years since I have seen a green hill or a green lawn, or any bit of green-covered ground. You cannot imagine how much I am longing for a sight of it.’ I could well understand her sensations, for she had been for two years in India.

I have been on the glorious mountains of Lebanon, and among the far-famed gardens of Damascus, and while doing full justice to the varied and picturesque scenery that meets the eye at almost every step on the tops and slopes of the former, and to the rich beauty and fragrance of the masses of roses and flowers and flowering trees in the latter, which, once seen, are never forgotten, I can still say that I have never seen anything to equal a bit of green lawn or hill in England. But the frequency of the sight in our own country prevents our wishing and longing for it, and in everyday conversation, as well as in verse and prose, speaking of it as if it were almost the very greatest boon in life, which is very often done in Damascus.

During my residence there, which extended over some years, I had much opportunity for studying the private habits and customs, and inner home-life, of the people, and, being able to converse with them in their own language, I have spent many hours with them in their own homes by the side of the running water in the bahra, and under the shadow of the lemon tree and oleander bush found in almost every court ; for poor indeed must that man

be, and wretchedly poor is his house considered, if neither bahra nor lemon tree graces the little court around which his rooms are built. As I go on I will describe one day in the life of a Christian artisan. I say Christian, for the Mohamedans, who compose the greater part of the population of Damascus, lead a life of their own, and are most fanatical and bigoted, and too little fitted to enjoy the simple pleasures of nature. The Greek, Roman Catholic, and Latin Christians, who since the fearful massacres of 1860-1 have dwindled down to not more than six or seven thousand, are a hard-working people, and it is in the daily life of one of this class of everyday workers that the love of green pastures and still waters is a part and parcel of his nature.

The houses in Damascus are built with the doors opening into a court or hall ; in the large and grand houses of the rich there are several courts, all but the outer one paved with marble. In the middle of each court is a large basin, or bahra, into which the water flows continually. Around the court or courts are built the reception and living rooms of the family. Above these are the frankat, or sleeping apartments. One room on the lower floor, between the two grandest reception rooms, has the whole side towards the court open. Cool mats cover the floor ; divans covered with chintz, and these again covered with snow-white covers, grace the three sides of the room ; a large lantern is suspended from the roof, and this is *par excellence* the family room during the greater part of the year. Climbing vines, roses, and jessamines cover the walls ; large trees—not bushes—of oleander (red and white), lemon, citron, and orange trees, covered with flowers and fruit in all their different stages, flowering geraniums, sweet-scented verbenas, and other flowers too numerous to mention, filling up the narrow beds that line the court around the trees and near the walls. The view is beautiful from the terrace, which is a delightful place for an evening promenade. I remember while walking with a friend on one of those terraces one lovely moonlight evening, as we looked down into the court, he turned and said to me, ‘ Well, I never could have imagined anything more fairylike and picturesque ! How could any one bear the poky houses in England after this ? ’

The very poorest houses have their little single court paved with stone, their little lewan, or room open to the court, which almost invariably has its bahra of stone or marble, its fragrant creepers climbing the walls, and at least one lemon, or orange, or

citron tree, so as always to have the pleasant shade of green before their eyes and the soothing sound of cool sparkling running water in their ears. They are almost invariably early risers; the class to which our family of artisans belong are generally on their feet before dawn. Their ablutions are freely performed around the bahra, or basin, as within two inches of it there are holes perforated in the pavement to let off the dirty water. Hands, face, and feet are freely washed, but anything more than that is left for the privacy of the public baths, of which there are many in Damascus. I have known an English gentleman dive into the bahra in his house and take his matutinal bath every morning, but this is never done by Easterns, although the water is always running, and they drink only from a sabha, or fountain, through which the water flows into the basin, as they love to keep it pure and sparkling just for the sense of pleasure it gives to the eye.

I will single out one day in the month of May 1877. The morning rises bright and clear, and the air is laden with the rich perfume of the many gardens which environ Damascus. One thousand and three hundred is, if I mistake not, about their number, taken in a round sum. The view of the city of Damascus from the old road which comes over the hill behind the Saliheyeh (a village on the outskirts of it) is most beautiful, as the white houses, domes, and minarets, lying in the form of a great kite, the thoroughly Mohamedan suburb of the Meidan supplying the tail, and all surrounded by the ever-green verdure of the gardens, with the rivers Barada and Nahr-el-Awaj (the ancient Abana and Pharpar of old, to which Naaman the Leper in Bible history so proudly alluded), fully justify what the prophet Mohamed is reported to have said of it. He, no doubt, saw it first from the top of the hill, as that was the only road in existence before the French road was made, and four-footed animals were the only means of conveyance. The legend says that being arrived at the summit of the hill (no doubt on the back of a camel, for he was a Bedouin of the desert), he arrested his animal and looked for some time in silence and wonder on the scene; then, turning to his followers, said, 'There is fardose (paradise) on earth; but as to man only one fardose is permitted, and I prefer to enjoy the heavenly one, let us go hence, for I will not enter it.' Thus, according to the Mohamedan legend, notwithstanding the long and weary journey, well known to all who have

visited Damascus some forty years ago, the Prophet was too dazed by its beauties to venture upon a nearer acquaintance with it. The people of Damascus are, as I have said, an essentially pleasure-loving race, and though they may have little else besides dry bread to eat, as long as their eye rests on green verdure and their ear is saluted with the sound of running water they are satisfied.

Their greatest delight is to spend the whole (if a feast day; the part, if a working one) of each day in the open fields, around a sparkling stream of water, where, under the shade of the lemon or orange or kharoub tree, they enjoy their simple meal of bread and fruit. A stroll at early dawn presents to the eye a pretty picture of many of these groups dotted here and there and everywhere, taking their simple al fresco breakfast. I only describe what I myself have assisted at, for, with true patriarchal hospitality, the passing stranger is invited to come and take a share of whatever is being eaten, whether it be simple or whether it be sumptuous.

The children frisk around the older people, but happily keep out of mischief in obedience to repeated injunctions of 'Rascheed, take care what you do,' 'Milhim, look after your little sister,' &c. A peasant passes with his cow, and for a trifle willingly fills the large tin coffee-pot with milk. Khaleel, the eldest son, gathers a few dry sticks and lights them, while Fareeda, his sister, attends to the coffee, made by throwing a few spoonfuls of it into the milk just before it boils, and then watching it attentively, and raising it off the fire each time it threatens to bubble over, until it becomes quite clear on the top, after which it is taken off the fire and left to stand on one side for a few minutes with the cover off. The mother brings out a small jar of honey; Zahra, another daughter, lays out the piles of freshly gathered purple mulberries or fragrant apricots on their own green leaves instead of plates; Naseef, another son, brings out the flat cakes of native home-made bread, the cups and plates (either of tin or of the cheapest delf), and then folding up his jacket, which he had thrown off on account of the heat, and laying it down for his mother to sit upon, he begins serving the coffee by carefully attending first to his father, if that worthy man has been able to accompany his family, in which case he has been sitting during these preparations gravely smoking his pipe, and throwing in a good-natured observation or suggestion now and then to one or other of the

party. Many of these breakfasts are over by sunrise, as the men, being mostly artisans, are obliged to hie away to their shops at an early hour. When the father and the elder sons have gone, and the little ones are packed off to school, the mother and daughters set to the making of beds, the sweeping of rooms, the sponging of the cool mats that cover the floors.

The midday meal is now carefully prepared, to be ready on the return of the bread-winners, which will be soon after the muezzin has uttered his call to the faithful at the hour of noon. The skemla, or small low table, is brought out and placed near the masnad, or low divan, where the father usually sits when at home ; on it is placed the sooddur, or tray, usually made of brass, and kept bright and shining, and the little meal is tastefully arranged. The plates are very small, but clean ; one contains a few olives, another a little toorshi, or home-made pickles, another a small piece of white native cheese and a few daintily washed radishes, and in the middle a loaf of bread and an earthenware goolah of water, which has been hung out all night in the open air and is deliciously cool.

The mother and daughters then sit down to their work ; for if the daughters are over fourteen they are expected to do their share towards their own maintenance, and accordingly one brings out her sewing, which she does for the tailors and is paid by piece-work ; another brings out her cushion and bobbins for the making of cords and trimmings, which are largely used in Eastern costumes ; and the mother brings out her stand for reeling off the coarse undyed silk and preparing it for the loom.

The midday call to prayer is no sooner sounded from the minaret than the patterning of little feet is heard. 'Take care and wipe your feet carefully before you come in,' calls out the mother anxiously, as she cranes her neck to get a glimpse of them from the open door, and trembles for her clean hall, but unwilling to cease her work even for a moment if she can help it. She calls the steadiest of the little group to her, gives him a small flat loaf, which she opens and fills with fruit if she has it in the house, or with an onion or small bit of cheese, and, telling him to eat his lunch as he goes along, sends him to his father to carry anything his father may have to bring home, as on his way to or from his shop the father has somehow managed to purchase the materials for the evening meal, which are now safely placed in a small kooffa,

or marketing basket, and consigned to the little boy, who proudly walks along in front of his father towards home.

On reaching home the frugal meal is quickly eaten, while family affairs are cheerfully discussed. It is a bright and busy scene and quickly got over, and all return to their labours—the men to their shops, the children to the school, and the girls to their work, while the mother opens the kooffa to see what her husband has brought home to be cooked for the dinner, which is always taken after the labour of the day is over. On working days this is something that requires but little preparation. If a fasting day, probably it will be a little fish, in which case it is carefully cleaned from scales and all inside impurities, well washed, and carefully salted and laid by in a cool place where no flies can come near it; or a small quantity of rice and lentils is made into the appetising dish of moojadra. If meat is brought it will most likely be mutton, as—in Syria, that is—the meat most preferred, one English pound of which, with the addition of vegetables, is considered amply sufficient for four or five persons. We will, then, presume that the dinner is to be one of kebabs. The good mother cuts up the lean meat into pieces of the size of a walnut, the fat into pieces half as large, and small onions into pieces as large as the pieces of fat, sprinkles the whole with salt and pepper, or instead of the pepper she may use a mixture of spices, mixes the whole together freely, and puts it on skewers in alternate slices of lean, fat, and onion, and then lays it by carefully covered up in a cool place.

The lettuce, &c., brought for the salad—for without a salad of some sort the kebab is seldom eaten—is placed on the bahra, or basin of running water, to keep cool till needed.

If a stew is to be prepared instead of kebab, a handful of charcoal is thrown into the little clay tubach, or stove, used alike by rich and poor, and kindled with a few tiny sticks; the meat and vegetables, always including one or more onions, are carefully browned in clarified butter and placed in a cooking-pot on the fire, the vegetables uppermost; the seasoning is added, and just enough water to cover the whole. The pot is covered up and left to simmer slowly all the afternoon, while mother and daughters go on steadily and busily plying their fingers. Visitors drop in. The daily news is discussed. The little coffee-pot on the brass mongal, always kept hot by its tiny bit of fire, is called into requisition again and again, as to each person dropping in is handed

about two thimblefuls of its contents in a tiny finjan, or cup resting in its yurrf, or holder, which among the poorer classes is made of brass.

As sunset draws near one of the daughters gets up and lays her work in its place, and busies herself with the remainder of the preparations for dinner. The kebab, which have already been put on the skewers, are carefully broiled on a clear fire ; or the stew is turned over to see if the meat is tender and the gravy is reduced to its proper consistency and quantity. A few drops of lemon-juice are always added to both these dishes. With the latter is generally an accompaniment of rice cooked in clarified butter and boiling water. The evening meal passes cheerily, and is taken in the lewan, or room with one side open to the court, which is now a merry scene. Work and household cares are apparently forgotten. The meal over, the nargheely carefully prepared for father and mother, and a tiny finjan of coffee handed to each of them, preparations are made for the crowning pleasure and relaxation of the day, which is nothing else than the favourite stroll by the river-side. Close to Bab Tooma (Gate of Thomas) is the part of the river called the Soofaniyeh, and farther on, about a quarter of an hour's distance, is another part called the Hudaashariyeh. These are favourite spots. The latter is the prettiest ; but the former, owing to its nearness to the city gates, is the chosen resort of those who are attended by wife and children. The gatherings of family circles in this place are innumerable and indescribable. I shall never forget the scene which presented itself on one of the occasions when I acceded to the wishes of some friends and accompanied them to the Soofaniyeh. Each family group sat together and apart from the rest, and yet they were so close together that it was impossible to count them or to see what they were sitting on—the women with their white eezars, or large cotton veils which only allowed their faces and hands to be seen ; the men with their long pipes in their mouths, and their jubbas, or long jackets, thrown carelessly on their shoulders ; the sellers of roasted nuts, almonds, and melon seeds calling out their wares ; the vendor of coffee, who has set up his little stall and is going about with his tiny coffee-pot and tinier finjan. There, at a little distance from the 'hareem,' or families, is a group of young men who take it upon themselves to supply the music ; one draws a tambour from his pocket, another a flute, another the ood, a native instrument ; a fourth

begins a well-known song. All listen eagerly, and give signs that if the music has been unsolicited it is not unappreciated. Between each song the finjan of coffee goes round, while the gurgling of the water between the stones and the soothing sound of the wind as it plays among the branches give the sense of pleasure, or kief, that a Syrian loves. In about an hour the first make a movement homeward ; in two hours none remain, and the coffee-vendor and his associates take their flight. All, all is perfect silence, and the river and trees are deserted, for all go early to bed, that they may get up early in the morning.

THE GREAT VALDEZ SAPPHIRE.

I KNOW more about it than any one else in the world, its present owner not excepted. I can give its whole history, from the Cingalese who found it—the Spanish adventurer who stole it—the cardinal who bought it—the Pope who graciously accepted it—the favoured son of the Church who received it—the gay and giddy duchess who pawned it—down to the eminent prelate who now holds it in trust as a family heirloom.

It will occupy a chapter to itself in my forthcoming work on 'Historic Stones,' where full details of its weight, size, colour, and value may be found. At present I am going to relate an incident in its history which, for obvious reasons, will not be published—which in fact I trust the reader will consider related in strict confidence.

I had never seen the stone itself when I began to write about it, and it was not till one evening last spring, while staying with my nephew, Sir Thomas Acton, that I came within measurable distance of it. A dinner-party was impending, and, at my instigation, the Bishop of Northchurch and Miss Panton, his daughter and heiress, were amongst the invited guests.

The dinner was a particularly good one, I remember that distinctly. In fact, I felt myself partly responsible for it, having engaged the new cook—a talented young Italian, pupil of the admirable old *chef* at my club. We had gone over the *menu* carefully together, with a result refreshing in its novelty, but not so daring as to disturb the minds of the innocent country guests who were bidden thereto.

The first spoonful of soup was reassuring, and I looked to the end of the table to exchange a congratulatory glance with Leta. What was amiss? No response. Her pretty face was flushed, her smile constrained, she was talking with quite unnecessary *empressement* to her neighbour Sir Harry Landor, though Leta is one of those few women who understand the importance of letting a man settle down tranquilly and with an undisturbed mind to the business of dining, allowing no topic of serious interest to come on before the *relevés*, and reserving mere conversational brilliancy for the *entremets*.

Guests all right? No disappointments? I had gone through the list with her, selecting just the right people to be asked to meet the Landors, our new neighbours. Not a mere cumbrous county gathering, nor yet a showy imported party from town, but a skilful blending of both. Had anything happened already? I had been late for dinner and missed the arrivals in the drawing-room. It was Leta's fault. She has got into a way of coming into my room and putting the last touches to my toilette. I let her, for I am doubtful of myself nowadays after many years' dependence on the best of valets. Her taste is generally beyond dispute, but to-day she had indulged in a feminine vagary that provoked me and made me late for dinner.

'Are you going to wear your sapphire, Uncle Paul?' she cried in a tone of dismay. 'Oh, why not the ruby?'

'You *would* have your way about the table decoration,' I gently reminded her. 'With that service of Crown Derby *repoussé* and orchids, the ruby would look absolutely barbaric. Now if you would have had the Limoges set, white candles and a yellow silk centre—'

'Oh, but—I'm *so* disappointed—I wanted the Bishop to see your ruby—or one of your engraved gems—'

'My dear, it is on the Bishop's account I put this on. You know his daughter is heiress of the great Valdez sapphire—'

'Of course she is, and when he has the charge of a stone three times as big as yours what's the use of wearing it? The ruby, dear Uncle Paul, *please!*'

She was desperately in earnest I could see, and considering the obligations which I am supposed to be under to her and Tom it was but a little matter to yield, but it involved a good deal of extra trouble. Studs, sleeve-links, watch-guard, all carefully selected to go with the sapphire, had to be changed, the emerald which I chose as a compromise requiring more florid accompaniments of a deeper tone of gold; and the dinner-hour struck as I replaced my jewel-case, the one relic left me of a once handsome fortune, in my fire-proof safe.

The emerald looked very well that evening, however. I kept my eyes upon it for comfort when Miss Panton proved trying.

She was a lean, yellow, dictatorial young person with no conversation. I spoke of her father's celebrated sapphires. 'My sapphires,' she amended sourly; 'though I am legally debarred from making any profitable use of them.' She furthermore

informed me that she viewed them as useless gauds, which ought to be disposed of for the benefit of the heathen. I gave the subject up, and while she discoursed of the work of the Blue Ribbon Army among the Bosjesman I tried to understand a certain dislocation in the arrangement of the table. Surely we were more or less in number than we should be? Opposite side all right. Who was extra on ours? I leaned forward. Lady Landor on one side of Tom, on the other who? I caught glimpses of plumes pink and green nodding over a dinner-plate, and beneath them a pink nose in a green visage with a nutcracker chin altogether unknown to me. A sharp grey eye shot a sideway glance down the table and caught me peeping, and I retreated, having only marked in addition two claw-like hands, with point-lace ruffles and a mass of brilliant rings, making good play with a knife and fork. Who was she? At intervals a high acid voice could be heard addressing Tom, and a laugh that made me shudder; it had the quality of the scream of a bird of prey or the yell of a jackal. I had heard that sort of laugh before, and it always made me feel like a defenceless rabbit.

Every time it sounded I saw Leta's fan flutter more furiously and her manner grow more nervously animated. Poor dear girl! I never in all my recollection wished a dinner at an end so earnestly so as to assure her of my support and sympathy, though without the faintest conception why either should be required.

The ices at last. A *menu* card folded in two was laid beside me. I read it unobserved. 'Keep the B. from joining us in the drawing-room.' The B.? The Bishop, of course. With pleasure. But why? And how? *That's* the question, never mind 'why.' Could I lure him into the library—the billiard-room—the conservatory? I doubted it, and I doubted still more what I should do with him when I got him there.

The Bishop is a grand and stately ecclesiastic of the mediæval type, broad-chested, deep-voiced, martial of bearing. I could picture him charging mace in hand at the head of his vassals, or delivering over a Dissenter of the period to the rack and thumb-screw, but not pottering amongst rare editions, tall copies and Grolier bindings, nor condescending to a quiet cigar amongst the tree-ferns and orchids. Leta must and should be obeyed I swore nevertheless, even if I were driven to lock the door in the fearless old-fashion of a by-gone day, and declare I'd shoot any man who left while a drop remained in the bottles.

The ladies were rising. The lady at the head of the line smirked and nodded her pink plumes coquettishly at Tom, while her hawk's eyes roved keen and predatory over us all. She stopped suddenly, creating a block and confusion.

'Ah, the dear Bishop! You there, and I never saw you? You must come and have a nice long chat presently. Bye-bye—!' She shook her fan at him over my shoulder and tripped off. Leta, passing me last, gave me a look of profound despair.

'Lady Carwitchet!' somebody exclaimed. 'I couldn't believe my eyes.'

'Thought she was dead or in penal servitude. Never should have expected to see her *here*,' said some one else behind me confidentially.

'What Carwitchet? Not the mother of the Carwitchet who—'

'Just so. The Carwitchet who—' Tom assented with a shrug. 'We needn't go further, as she's my guest. Just my luck. I met them at Buxton, thought them uncommonly good company—in fact, Carwitchet laid me under a great obligation about a horse I was nearly let in for buying—and gave them a general invitation here, as one does you know. Never expected her to turn up with her luggage this afternoon just before dinner, to stay a week, or a fortnight if Carwitchet can join her.' A groan of sympathy ran round the table. 'It can't be helped. I've told you this just to show that I shouldn't have asked you here to meet this sort of people of my own free will; but, as it is, please say no more about them. The subject was not dropped by any means, and I took care that it should not be. At our end of the table one story after another went buzzing round—*sotto voce*, out of deference to Tom—but perfectly audible.

'Carwitchet? Ah yes. Mixed up in that Rawlings Divorce case, wasn't he? A bad lot. Turned out of the Dragoon Guards for cheating at cards, or picking pockets, or something—remember the row at the Cerulean Club? Scandalous exposure—and that forged letter business—Oh, that was the mother—prosecution hushed up somehow. Ought to be serving her fourteen years—and that business of poor Farrars, the banker—got hold of some of his secrets and blackmailed him till he blew his brains out—'

It was so exciting that I clean forgot the Bishop, till a low gasp at my elbow startled me. He was lying back in his chair his mighty shaven jowl a ghastly white, his fierce imperious eyebrows drooping limp over his fish-like eyes, his splendid figur-

shrunk and contracted. He was trying with a shaking hand to pour out wine. The decanter clattered against the glass and the wine spilled on the cloth.

'I'm afraid you find the room too warm. Shall we go into the library?'

He rose hastily and followed me like a lamb.

He recovered himself once we got into the hall, and affably rejected all my proffers of brandy and soda—medical advice—everything else my limited experience could suggest. He only demanded his carriage 'directly,' and that Miss Panton should be summoned forthwith.

I made the best use I could of the time left me.

'I'm uncommonly sorry you do not feel equal to staying a little longer, my lord. I counted on showing you my few trifles of precious stones, the salvage from the wreck of my possessions. Nothing in comparison with your own collection.'

The Bishop clasped his hand over his heart. His breath came short and quick.

'A return of that dizziness,' he explained with a faint smile. 'You are thinking of the Valdez sapphire, are you not? Some day,' he went on with forced composure, 'I may have the pleasure of showing it to you. It is at my banker's just now.'

Miss Panton's steps were heard in the hall. 'You are well known as a connoisseur, Mr. Acton,' he went on hurriedly. 'Is your collection valuable? If so, *keep it safe; don't trust a ring off your hand, or the key of your jewel-case out of your pocket till the house is clear again.*' The words rushed from his lips in an impetuous whisper, he gave me a meaning glance, and departed with his daughter. I went back to the drawing-room, my head swimming with bewilderment.

'What! The dear Bishop gone!' screamed Lady Carwitchet from the central ottoman where she sat, surrounded by most of the gentlemen, all apparently well entertained by her conversation. 'And I wanted a talk over old times with him so badly. His poor wife was my greatest friend. Mira Montanaro, daughter of the great banker, you know. It's not possible that that miserable little prig is my poor Mira's girl. The heiress of all the Montanaros in a black lace gown worth twopence! When I think of her mother's beauty and her toilettes! Does she ever wear the sapphires? Has any one ever seen her in them? Eleven large stones in a lovely antique setting, and the great Valdez sapphire

—worth thousands and thousands—for the pendant.' No one replied. 'I wanted to get a rise out of the Bishop to-night. It used to make him so mad when I wore this.'

She fumbled amongst the laces at her throat, and clawed out a pendant that hung to a velvet round her neck. I fairly gasped when she removed her hand. A sapphire of irregular shape flashed out its blue lightning on us. Such a stone! A true, rich, cornflower blue even by that wretched artificial light, with soft velvety depths of colour and dazzling clearness of tint in its lights and shades—a stone to remember! I stretched out my hand involuntarily, but Lady Carwitchet drew back with a coquettish squeal. 'No! no! You mustn't look any closer. Tell me what you think of it now. Isn't it pretty?'

'Superb!' was all I could ejaculate, staring at the azure splendour of that miraculous jewel in a sort of trance.

She gave a shrill cackling laugh of mockery.

'The great Mr. Acton taken in by a bit of Palais Royal gimerackery! What an advertisement for Bogaerts et Cie.! They are perfect artists in frauds. Don't you remember their stand at the first Paris Exhibition? They had imitations there of every celebrated stone; but I never expected anything made by man could delude Mr. Acton, never!' And she went off into another mocking cackle, and all the idiots round her haw-hawed knowingly, as if they had seen the joke all along. I was too bewildered to reply, which was on the whole lucky. 'I suppose I mustn't tell why I came to give quite a big sum in francs for this?' she went on, tapping her closed lips with her closed fan, and cocking her eye at us all like a parrot wanting to be coaxed to talk. 'It's a queer story.'

I didn't want to hear her anecdote, especially as I saw she wanted to tell it. What I *did* want was to see that pendant again. She had thrust it back amongst her laces, only the loop which held it to the velvet being visible. It was set with three small sapphires, and even from a distance I clearly made them out to be imitations, and poor ones. I felt a queer thrill of self-mistrust. Was the large stone no better? Could I, even for an instant, have been dazzled by a sham, and a sham of that quality? The events of the evening had flurried and confused me. I wished to think them over in quiet. I would go to bed.

My rooms at the Manor are the best in the house. Leta will have it so. I must explain their position for a reason to be

understood later. My bed-room is in the south-east angle of the house ; it opens on one side into a sitting-room in the east corridor, the rest of which is taken up by the suite of rooms occupied by Tom and Leta ; and on the other side into my bath-room, the first room in the south corridor, where the principal guest-chambers are, to one of which it was originally the dressing-room. Passing this room I noticed a couple of housemaids preparing it for the night, and discovered with a shiver that Lady Carwitchet was to be my next-door neighbour. It gave me a turn.

The Bishop's strange warning must have unnerved me. I was perfectly safe from her ladyship. The disused door into her room was locked, and the key safe on the housekeeper's bunch. It was also undiscoverable on her side, the recess in which it stood being completely filled by a large wardrobe. On my side hung a thick sound-proof *portière*. Nevertheless I resolved not to use that room while she inhabited the next one. I removed my possessions, fastened the door of communication with my bed-room, and dragged a heavy ottoman across it.

Then I stowed away my emerald in my strong-box. It is built into the wall of my sitting-room, and masked by the lower part of an old carved oak bureau. I put away even the rings I wore habitually, keeping out only an inferior cat's-eye for work-a-day wear. I had just made all safe when Leta tapped at the door and came in to wish me good-night. She looked flushed and harassed, and ready to cry. 'Uncle Paul,' she began, 'I want you to go up to town at once, and stay away till I send for you.'

'My dear——!' I was too amazed to expostulate.

'We've got a—a pestilence amongst us,' she declared, her foot tapping the ground angrily, 'and the least we can do is to go into quarantine. Oh, I'm so sorry and ashamed! The poor Bishop! I'll take good care that no one else shall meet that woman here. You did your best for me, Uncle Paul, and managed admirably, but it was all no use. I hoped against hope that what between the dusk of the drawing-room before dinner, and being put at opposite ends of the table, we might get through without a meeting—'

'But, my dear, explain. Why shouldn't the Bishop and Lady Carwitchet meet? Why is it worse for him than any one else?'

'Why? I thought everybody had heard of that dreadful wife of his who nearly broke his heart. If he married her for her

money it served him right, but Lady Landor says she was very handsome and really in love with him at first. Then Lady Carwitchet got hold of her and led her into all sorts of mischief. She left her husband, he was only a rector with a country living in those days, and went to live in town, got into a horrid fast set, and made herself notorious. You *must* have heard of her.'

'I heard of her sapphires, my dear. But I was in Brazil at the time.'

'I wish you had been at home. You might have found her out. She was furious because her husband refused to let her wear the great Valdez sapphire. It had been in the Montanaro family for some generations, and her father settled it first on her and then on her little girl—the Bishop being trustee. He felt obliged to take away the little girl, and send her off to be brought up by some old aunts in the country, and he locked up the sapphire. Lady Carwitchet tells as a splendid joke how they got the copy made in Paris, and it did just as well for people to stare at. No wonder the Bishop hates the very name of the stone.'

'How long will she stay here?' I asked dismally.

'Till Lord Carwitchet can come and escort her to Paris to visit some American friends. Goodness knows when that will be! Do go up to town, Uncle Paul!'

I refused indignantly. The very least I could do was to stand by my poor young relatives in their troubles and help them through. I did so. I wore that inferior cat's eye for six weeks!

It is a time I cannot think of even now without a shudder. The more I saw of that terrible old woman the more I detested her, and we saw a very great deal of her. Leta kept her word, and neither accepted nor gave invitations all that time. We were cut off from all society but that of old General Fairford, who would go anywhere and meet any one to get a rubber after dinner; the doctor, a sporting widower; and the Duberlys, a giddy, rather racketty young couple who had taken the Dower House for a year. Lady Carwitchet seemed perfectly content. She revelled in the soft living and good fare of the Manor House, the drives in Leta's big barouche and Domenico's dinners, as one to whom short commons were not unknown. She had a hungry way of grabbing and grasping at everything she could—the shillings she won at whist, the best fruit at dessert, the postage-stamps in the library ink-stand—that was infinitely suggestive. Sometimes I could have pitied her, she was so greedy, so spiteful, so friendless. She

always made me think of some wicked old pirate putting into a peaceful port to provision and repair his battered old hulk, obliged to live on friendly terms with the natives, but his piratical old nostrils a-sniff for plunder and his piratical old soul longing to be off marauding once more. When would that be? Not till the arrival in Paris of her distinguished American friends, of whom we heard a great deal. 'Charming people, the Bokums of Chicago, the American branch of the English Beauchamps, you know!' They seemed to be taking an unconscionable time to get there. She would have insisted on being driven over to Northchurch to call at the palace, but that the Bishop was understood to be holding confirmations at the other end of the diocese.

I was alone in the house one afternoon sitting by my window, toying with the key of my safe, and wondering whether I dare treat myself to a peep at my treasures, when a suspicious movement in the park below me caught my attention. A black figure certainly dodged from behind one tree to the next, and then into the shadow of the park-paling instead of keeping to the footpath. It looked queer. I caught up my field-glass and marked him at one point where he was bound to come into the open for a few steps. He crossed the strip of turf with giant strides and got into cover again, but not quick enough to prevent me recognising him. It was—Great Heavens!—the Bishop! In a soft hat pulled over his forehead, with a long cloak and a big stick, he looked like a poacher.

Guided by some mysterious instinct I hurried to meet him. I opened the conservatory door, and in he rushed like a hunted rabbit. Without explanation I led him up the side staircase to my room, where he dropped into a chair and wiped his face.

'You are astonished, Mr. Acton,' he panted. 'I will explain directly. Thanks.' He tossed off the glass of brandy I had poured out without waiting for the qualifying soda, and looked better.

'I am in serious trouble. You can help me. I've had a shock to-day—a grievous shock.' He stopped and tried to pull himself together. 'I must trust you implicitly, Mr. Acton, I have no choice. Tell me what you think of this.' He drew a case from his breast pocket, opened it. 'I promised you should see the Valdez sapphire. Look there!'

The Valdez sapphire! A great big shining lump of blue crystal—flawless and of perfect colour—that was all. I took it up, breathed on it, drew out my magnifier, looked at it in one light

and another. What was wrong with it? I could not say. Nine experts out of ten would undoubtedly have pronounced the stone genuine. I, by virtue of some mysterious instinct that has hitherto always guided me aright, was the unlucky tenth. I looked at the Bishop. His eyes met mine. There was no need of spoken word between us.

'Has Lady Carwitchet shown you her sapphire?' was his most unexpected question. 'She has? Now, Mr. Acton, on your honour as a connoisseur and a gentleman, which of the two is the Valdez?'

'Not this one.' I could say naught else.

'You were my last hope.' He broke off, and dropped his face on his folded arms with a groan that shook the table on which he rested, while I stood dismayed at myself for having let so hasty a judgment escape me. He lifted a ghastly countenance to me. 'She vowed she would see me ruined and disgraced. I made her my enemy by crossing some of her schemes once, and she never forgives. She will keep her word. I shall appear before the world as a fraudulent trustee. I can neither produce the valuable confided to my charge nor make the loss good. I have only an incredible story to tell,' he dropped his head and groaned again.

'Who will believe me?'

'I will, for one.'

'Ah, you? Yes, you know her.' She took my wife from me, Mr. Acton. Heaven only knows what the hold was that she had over poor Mira. She encouraged her to set me at defiance and eventually to leave me. She was answerable for all the scandalous folly and extravagance of poor Mira's life in Paris—spare me the telling of the story. She left her at last to die alone and uncared for. I reached my wife to find her dying of a fever from which Lady Carwitchet and all her crew had fled. She was raving in delirium, and died without recognising me. Some trouble she had been in which I must never know oppressed her. At the very last she roused from a long stupor and spoke to the nurse. 'Tell him to get the sapphire back—she stole it. She has robbed my child.' Those were her last words. The nurse understood no English, and treated them as wandering; but I heard them, and knew she was sane when she spoke.'

'What did you do?'

'What could I? I saw Lady Carwitchet, who laughed at me, and defied me to make her confess or disgorge. I took the pen-

dant to more than one eminent jeweller on pretence of having the setting seen to, and all have examined and admired without giving a hint of there being anything wrong. I allowed a celebrated mineralogist to see it; he gave no sign—'

'Perhaps they are right and we are wrong.'

'No, no. Listen. I heard of an old Dutchman celebrated for his imitations. I went to him, and he told me at once that he had been allowed by Montanaro to copy the Valdez—setting and all—for the Paris Exhibition. I showed him this, and he claimed it for his own work at once, and pointed out his private mark upon it. You must take your magnifier to find it; a Greek Beta. He also told me that he had sold it to Lady Carwitchet more than a year ago.'

'It is a terrible position.'

'It is. My co-trustee died lately. I have never dared to have another appointed. I am bound to hand over the sapphire to my daughter on her marriage, if her husband consents to take the name of Montanaro.'

The Bishop's face was ghastly pale, and the moisture started on his brow. I racked my brain for some word of comfort.

'Miss Panton may never marry.'

'But she will!' he shouted. 'That is the blow that has been dealt me to-day. My chaplain—actually, my chaplain tells me that he is going out as a temperance missionary to Equatorial Africa, and has the assurance to add that he believes my daughter is not indisposed to accompany him!' His consuming wrath acted as a momentary stimulant. He sat upright, his eyes flashing and his brow thunderous. I felt for that chaplain. Then he collapsed miserably. 'The sapphires will have to be produced, identified, revalued. How shall I come out of it? Think of the disgrace, the ripping up of old scandals! Even if I were to compound with Lady Carwitchet, the sum she hinted at was too monstrous. She wants more than my money. Help me, Mr. Acton! For the sake of your own family interests, help me!'

'I beg your pardon—family interests? I don't understand.'

'If my daughter is childless, her next-of-kin is poor Marmaduke Panton, who is dying at Cannes, not married, or likely to marry; and failing him, your nephew, Sir Thomas Acton, succeeds.'

My nephew Tom! Leta, or Leta's baby, might come to be the possible inheritor of the great Valdez sapphire! The blood rushed to my head as I looked at the great shining swindle before

me. ‘What diabolic jugglery was at work when the exchange was made?’ I demanded fiercely.

‘It must have been on the last occasion of her wearing the sapphires in London. I ought never to have let her out of my sight.’

‘You must put a stop to Miss Panton’s marriage in the first place,’ I pronounced as autocratically as he could have done himself.

‘Not to be thought of,’ he admitted helplessly. ‘Mira has my force of character. She knows her rights, and she will have her jewels. I want you to take charge of the—thing for me. If it’s in the house she’ll make me produce it. She’ll inquire at the banker’s. If *you* have it we can gain time, if but for a day or two.’ He broke off. Carriage wheels were crashing on the gravel outside. We looked at one another in consternation. Flight was imperative. I hurried him downstairs and out of the conservatory just as the door-bell rang. I think we both lost our heads in the confusion. He shoved the case into my hands, and I pocketed it, without a thought of the awful responsibility I was incurring, and saw him disappear into the shelter of the friendly night.

When I think of what my feelings were that evening—of my murderous hatred of that smirking, jesting Jezebel who sat opposite me at dinner, my wrathful indignation at the thought of the poor little expected heir, defrauded ere his birth; of the crushing contempt I felt for myself and the Bishop as a pair of witless idiots unable to see our way out of the dilemma; all this boiling and surging through my soul, I can only wonder—Domenico having given himself a holiday, and the kitchen-maid doing her worst and wickedest—that gout or jaundice did not put an end to this story at once.

‘Uncle Paul!’ Leta was looking her sweetest when she tripped into my room next morning. ‘I’ve news for you. She,’ pointing a delicate forefinger in the direction of the corridor, ‘is going! Her Bokums have reached Paris at last, and sent for her to join them at the Grand Hotel.’

I was thunderstruck. The longed-for deliverance had but come to remove hopelessly and for ever out of my reach Lady Carwitchet and the great Valdez sapphire.

‘Why, aren’t you overjoyed? I am. We are going to celebrate the event by a dinner-party. Tom’s hospitable soul is vexed by the lack of entertainment we had provided her. We must ask the Brownleys some day or other, and they will be

delighted to meet anything in the way of a ladyship, or such smart folks as the Duberly-Parkers. Then we may as well have the Blomfields, and air that awful modern Sèvres dessert-service she gave us when we were married.' I had no objection to make, and she went on, rubbing her soft cheek against my shoulder like the purring little cat she was, 'Now I want you to do something to please me—and Mrs. Blomfield. She has set her heart on seeing your rubies, and though I know you hate her about as much as you do that Sèvres china—'

'What! Wear my rubies with that! I won't. I'll tell you what I will do, though. I've got some carbuncles as big as prize gooseberries, a whole set. Then you have only to put those Bohemian glass vases and candelabra on the table, and let your gardener do his worst with his great forced, scentless, vulgar blooms, and we shall all be in keeping.' Leta pouted. An idea struck me. 'Or I'll do as you wish, on one condition. You get Lady Carwitchet to wear her big sapphire, and don't tell her I wish it.'

I lived through the next few days as one in some evil dream. The sapphires, like twin spectres, haunted me day and night. Was ever man so tantalised? To hold the shadow and see the substance dangled temptingly within reach. The Bishop made no sign of ridding me of my unwelcome charge, and the thought of what might happen in case of a burglary—a fire—an earthquake—made me start and tremble at all sorts of inopportune moments.

I kept faith with Leta, and reluctantly produced my beautiful rubies on the night of her dinner-party. Emerging from my room I came full upon Lady Carwitchet in the corridor. She was dressed for dinner, and at her throat I caught the blue gleam of the great sapphire. Leta had kept faith with me. I don't know what I stammered in reply to her ladyship's glib remarks; my whole soul was absorbed in the contemplation of the intoxicating loveliness of the gem. *That* a Palais Royal deception. Incredible! My fingers twitched, my breath came short and fierce with the lust of possession. She must have seen the covetous glare in my eyes. A look of gratified spiteful complacency overspread her features, as she swept on ahead and descended the stairs before me. I followed her to the drawing-room door. She stopped suddenly, and murmuring something unintelligible hurried back again.

Everybody was assembled there that I expected to see, with an addition. Not a welcome one by the look on Tom's face. He stood on the hearth-rug conversing with a great hulking high-

shouldered fellow, sallow-faced, with a heavy moustache and drooping eyelids, from the corners of which flashed out a sudden suspicious look as I approached, which lighted up into a greedy one as it rested on my rubies, and seemed unaccountably familiar to me, till Lady Carwitchet tripping past me exclaimed :

'He has come at last! My naughty, naughty boy! Mr. Acton, this is my son, Lord Carwitchet!'

I broke off short in the midst of my polite acknowledgments to stare blankly at her. The sapphire was gone! A great gilt cross, with a Scotch pebble like an acid drop, was her sole decoration.

'I had to put my pendant away,' she explained confidentially; 'the clasp had got broken somehow.' I didn't believe a word.

Lord Carwitchet contributed little to the general entertainment at dinner, but fell into confidential talk with Mrs. Duberly-Parker. I caught a few unintelligible remarks across the table. They referred, I subsequently discovered, to the lady's little book on Northchurch races, and I recollect that the Spring Meeting was on, and to-morrow 'Cup Day.' After dinner there was great talk about getting up a party to go on General Fairford's drag. Lady Carwitchet was in ecstasies and tried to coax me into joining. Leta declined positively. Tom accepted sulkily.

The look in Lord Carwitchet's eye returned to my mind as I locked up my rubies that night. It made him look so like his mother! I went round my fastenings with unusual care. Safe and closets, and desk and doors, I tried them all. Coming at last to the bath-room, it opened at once. It was the housemaid's doing. She had evidently taken advantage of my having abandoned the room to give it 'a thorough spring cleaning,' and I anathematised her. The furniture was all piled together and veiled with sheets, the carpet and felt curtain were gone, there were new brooms about. As I peered around a voice close at my ear made me jump. Lady Carwitchet's!

'I tell you I have nothing, not a penny! I shall have to borrow my train-fare before I can leave this. They'll be glad enough to lend it.'

Not only had the *portière* been removed, but the door behind it had been unlocked and left open for convenience of dusting behind the wardrobe. I might as well have been in the bedroom.

'Don't tell me,' I recognised Carwitchet's growl. 'You've not been here all this time for nothing. You've been collecting for a Kilburn cot or getting subscriptions for the distressed Irish landlords. I know you. Now I'm not going to see myself ruined

for the want of a paltry hundred or so. I tell you the colt is a dead certainty. If I could have got a thousand or two on him last week we might have ended our dog-days millionaires. Hand over what you can. You've money's worth, if not money. Where's that sapphire you stole ?'

'I didn't. I can show you the received bill. All *I* possess is honestly come by. What could you do with it, even if I gave it to you? You couldn't sell it as the Valdez, and you can't get it cut up as you might if it were real.'

'If it's only bogus, why are you always in such a flutter about it? I'll do something with it, never fear. Hand over.'

'I can't. I haven't got it. I had to raise something on it before I left town.'

'Will you swear it's not in that wardrobe? I dare say you will. I mean to see. Give me those keys.'

I heard a struggle and a jingle, then the wardrobe-door must have been flung open, for a streak of light struck through a crack in the wood of the back. Creeping close and peeping through I could see an awful sight. Lady Carwitchet in a flannel wrapper, minus hair, teeth, complexion, pointing a skinny forefinger that quivered with rage at her son, who was out of the range of my vision.

'Stop that, and throw those keys down here directly, or I'll rouse the house. Sir Thomas is a magistrate, and will lock you up as soon as look at you.' She clutched at the bell-rope as she spoke. 'I'll swear I'm in danger of my life from you and give you in charge. Yes, and when you're in prison I'll keep you there till you die. I've often thought I'd do it. How about the hotel robberies last summer at Cowes, eh? Mightn't the police be grateful for a hint or two? And how about—'

The keys fell with a crash on the bed, accompanied by some bad language in an apologetic tone, and the door slammed to. I crept trembling to bed.

This new and horrible complication of the situation filled me with dismay. Lord Carwitchet's wolfish glance at my rubies took a new meaning. They were safe enough, I believed—but the sapphire! If he disbelieved his mother, how long would she be able to keep it from his clutches? That she had some plot of her own of which the Bishop would eventually be the victim I did not doubt, or why had she not made her bargain with him long ago. But supposing she took fright, lost her head, allowed her son to wrest the jewel from her, or gave consent to its being mutilated, divided. I lay in a cold perspiration till morning.

My terrors haunted me all day. They were with me at breakfast-time when Lady Carwitchet, tripping in smiling, made a last attempt to induce me to accompany her and keep her 'Bad, bad boy!' from getting amongst 'those horrid betting-men!'

They haunted me through the long peaceful day with Leta and the *tête-à-tête* dinner, but they swarmed around and beset me sorest when, sitting alone over my sitting-room fire, I listened for the return of the drag party. I read my newspaper and brewed myself some hot strong drink, but there comes a time of night when no fire can warm and no drink can cheer. The Bishop's despairing face kept me company, and his troubles and the wrongs of the future heir took possession of me. Then the uncanny noises that make all old houses ghostly during the small hours began to make themselves heard. Muffled footsteps trod the corridor, stopping to listen at every door, door-latches gently clicked, boards creaked unreasonably, sounds of stealthy movements came from the locked-up bathroom. The welcome crash of wheels at last, and the sound of the front-door bell. I could hear Lady Carwitchet making her shrill *adieu*s to her friends and her steps in the corridor. She was softly humming a little song as she approached. I heard her unlock her bedroom-door before she entered—an odd thing to do. Tom came sleepily stumbling to his room later. I put my head out. 'Where is Lord Carwitchet?'

'Haven't you seen him? He left us hours ago. Not come home, eh? Well, he's welcome to stay away. I don't want to see more of him.' Tom's brow was dark and his voice surly. 'I gave him to understand as much.' Whatever had happened, Tom was evidently too disgusted to explain just then.

I went back to my fire unaccountably relieved, and brewed myself another and a stronger brew. It warmed me this time, but excited me foolishly. There must be some way out of the difficulty. I felt now as if I could almost see it if I gave my mind to it. Why—suppose—there might be no difficulty after all! The Bishop was a nervous old gentleman. He might have been mistaken all through, Bogaerts might have been mistaken, I might— No. I could not have been mistaken—or I thought not. I fidgeted and fumed and argued with myself, till I found I should have no peace of mind without a look at the stone in my possession, and I actually went to the safe and took the case out.

The sapphire certainly looked different by lamp-light. I sat and stared, and all but over-persuaded my better judgment into giving it a verdict. Bogaerts's mark—I suddenly remembered it.

I took my magnifier and held the pendant to the light. There, scratched upon the stone, was the Greek Beta! There came a tap on my door, and before I could answer the handle turned softly, and Lord Carwitchet stood before me. I whipped the case into my dressing-gown pocket and stared at him. He was not pleasant to look at, especially at that time of night. He had a dishevelled, desperate air, his voice was hoarse, his red-rimmed eyes wild.

'I beg your pardon,' he began civilly enough. 'I saw your light burning, and thought, as we go by the early train to-morrow, you might allow me to consult you now on a little business of my mother's.' His eyes roved about the room. Was he trying to find the whereabouts of my safe? 'You know a lot about precious stones, don't you?'

'So my friends are kind enough to say. Won't you sit down? I have unluckily little chance of indulging the taste on my own account,' was my cautious reply.

'But you've written a book about them, and know them when you see them, don't you? Now my mother has given me something, and would like you to give a guess at its value. Perhaps you can put me in the way of disposing of it?'

'I certainly can do so if it is worth anything. Is that it?' I was in a fever of excitement, for I guessed what was clutched in his palm. He held out to me the Valdez sapphire.

How it shone and sparkled like a great blue star! I made myself smile a deprecating smile as I took it from him, but how dare I call it false to its face. As well accuse the sun in heaven of being a cheap imitation. I faltered and prevaricated feebly. Where was my moral courage, and where was the good honest thumping lie that should have aided me! 'I have the best authority for recognising this as a very good copy of a famous stone in the possession of the Bishop of Northchurch. His scowl grew so black, that I saw he believed me, and went on more cheerily: 'This was manufactured by Johannes Bogaerts—I can give you his address, and you can make inquiries yourself—by special permission of the then owner, the late Leone Montanaro.'

'Hand it back!' he interrupted (his other remarks were outrageous, but satisfactory to hear); but I waved him off. I couldn't give it up. It fascinated me. I toyed with it, I caressed it. I made it display its different tones of colour. I must see the two stones together. I must see it outshine its paltry rival. It was a whimsical frenzy that seized me—I can call it by no other name.

'Would you like to see the original? Curiously enough, I have it here. The Bishop has left it in my charge.'

The wolfish light flamed up in Carwitchet's eyes as I drew forth the case. He laid the Valdez down on a sheet of paper, and I placed the other, still in its case, beside it. In that moment they looked identical, except for the little loop of sham stones, replaced by a plain gold band in the Bishop's jewel. Carwitchet leant across the table eagerly, the table gave a lurch, the lamp tottered, crashed over, and we were left in semi-darkness.

'Don't stir!' Carwitchet shouted. 'The paraffin is all over the place!' He seized my sofa-blanket, and flung it over the table while I stood helpless. 'There, that's safe now. Have you candles on the chimney-piece? I've got matches.'

He looked very white and excited as he lit up. 'Might have been an awkward job with all that burning paraffin running about,' he said quite pleasantly. 'I hope no real harm is done.' I was lifting the rug with shaking hands. The two stones lay as I had placed them. No! I nearly dropped it back again. It was the stone in the case that had the loop with the three sham sapphires!

Carwitchet picked the other up hastily. 'So you say this is rubbish?' he asked, his eyes sparkling wickedly, and an attempt at mortification in his tone.

'Utter rubbish!' I pronounced, with truth and decision, snapping up the case and pocketing it. 'Lady Carwitchet must have known it.'

'Ah, well, it's disappointing, isn't it? Good-bye, we shall not meet again.'

I shook hands with him most cordially. 'Good-bye, Lord Carwitchet. So glad to have met you and your mother. It has been a source of the greatest pleasure, I assure you.'

I have never seen the Carwitchets since. The Bishop drove over next day in rather better spirits. Miss Panton had refused the chaplain.

'It doesn't matter, my lord,' I said to him heartily. 'We've all been under some strange misconception. The stone in your possession is the veritable one. I could swear to that anywhere. The sapphire Lady Carwitchet wears is only an excellent imitation, and—I have seen it with my own eyes—is the one bearing Bogaerts's mark, the Greek Beta.'





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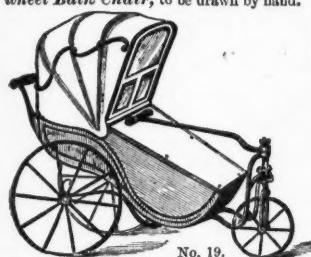
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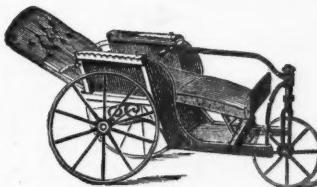
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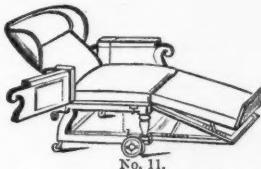


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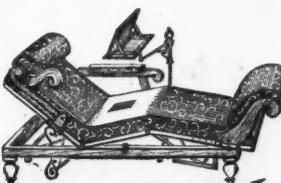


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THE
CORNHILL MAGAZINE.

JUNE 1890.

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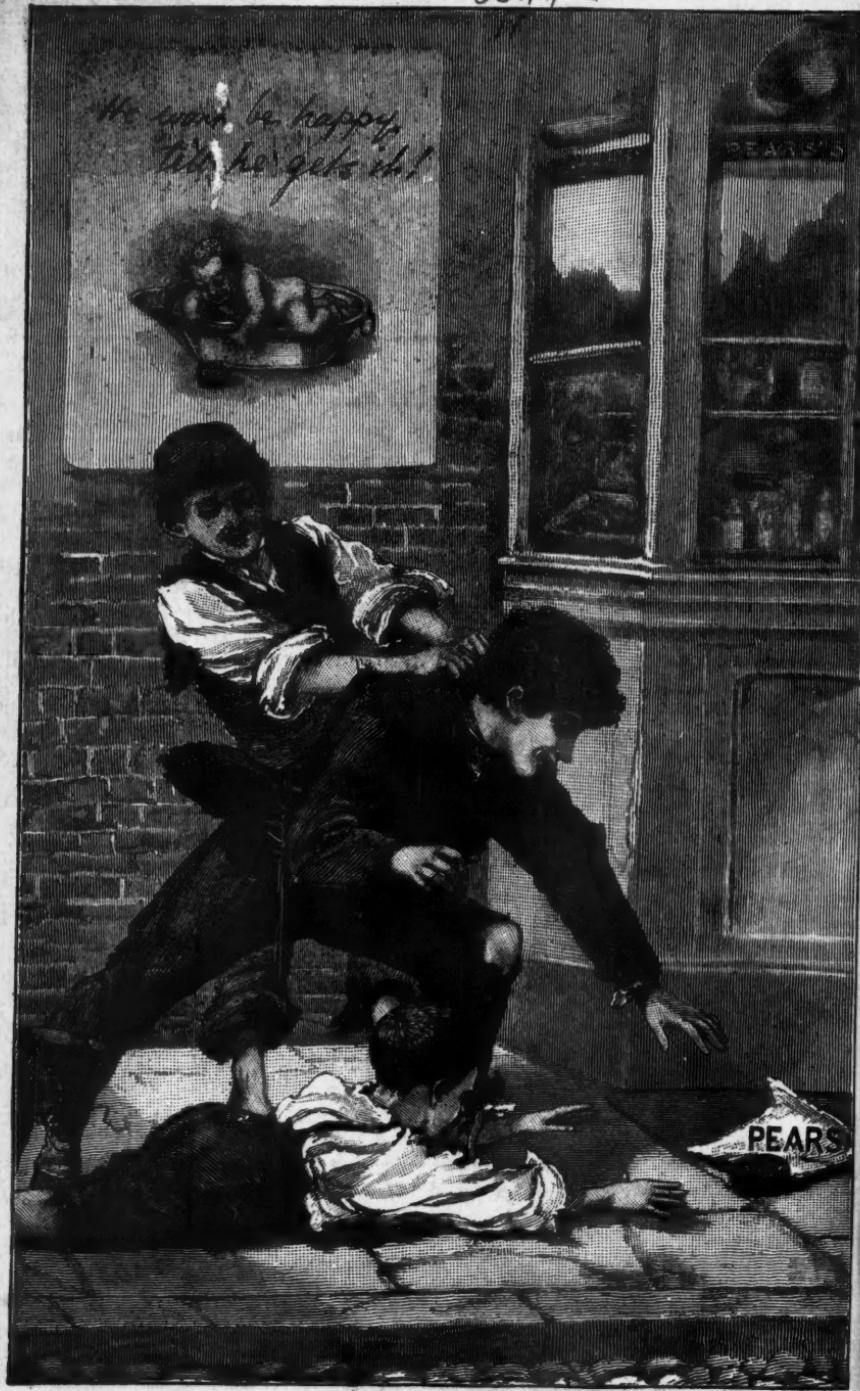
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